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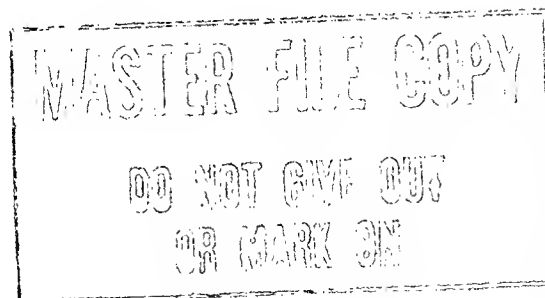
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# Bangladesh: A Handbook

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# Bangladesh: A Handbook

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This handbook was prepared by [redacted]  
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## Bangladesh: A Handbook

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**Introduction**

*Information available  
as of 1 November 1982  
was used in this report.*

Bangladesh is one of the world's poorest and most tragic countries. Its largely Muslim population of 93 million, crowded into an area the size of Wisconsin, has created intense pressure on limited resources. On the basis of current projections of an average annual population growth rate of 3.1 percent, another 9 million Bangladeshis will be added by 1985. The country's residents have a literacy rate of only 23 percent, a yearly per capita income of \$140, and a life expectancy of 48 years. Unpredictable weather conditions can mean the difference between mere survival and famine. Mercurial emotionalism, fervent but often temporary loyalty to leaders, and a tendency toward political violence among Bangladeshis have contributed to social and economic problems by hindering the establishment of effective government, despite Bangladesh's ethnic homogeneity.

US interest in Bangladesh, besides humanitarian, is largely based on the goal of preserving regional stability in South Asia. Bangladesh is too economically and militarily weak to pose a threat to regional states, and it must maintain a nonaligned, diplomatic stance to preserve economic aid and to maintain smooth relations with its dominant neighbor, India. Although mutual distrust exacerbates differences between the two countries, Bangladeshis recognize they have little choice but to cooperate with the Indians. For leverage in the Bangladesh-Indian relationship as well as to provide an additional donor source, Bangladesh has sought closer relations with other Islamic countries, particularly Saudi Arabia.

Bangladesh has been an independent nation only since December 1971, following a bloody nine-month civil war between East and West Pakistan. During its 11 years as a nation, the country has had little political stability. Three leaders have died by gunfire, and military coup attempts have been frequent. The last leader to be assassinated was President Ziaur Rahman (Zia), who had himself come to power as a result of a military coup. After nearly six years in power, the charismatic Zia had changed Bangladesh's image from one of hopeless poverty and disorder to that of a country successfully attacking its problems. His assassination in May 1981 contributed to a new period of uncertainty for the country.

Given the lack of adequate civilian leadership, the military has evolved into the dominant political institution. In March 1982, following increasing military dissatisfaction over the aging, elected President Sattar's inability

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to handle economic problems and political corruption, Lt. Gen. H. M. Ershad, Army Chief of Staff, orchestrated a bloodless coup and declared martial law.

The political situation in Bangladesh remains unsettled and is not much better than it was prior to the military takeover. Ershad, now Chief Martial Law Administrator, is still attempting to consolidate his authority and must govern with the consensus of some six senior military officers. Military disunity and earlier allegations of questionable financial dealings, which threaten Ershad's own credibility, could erode his fragile political base and open the possibility for future military coups by disenchanted opponents.

Continued economic deterioration is also likely to lead to political unrest. Prospects for immediate economic improvement are poor. The economy has been hard hit by unfavorable weather, inappropriate government economic policies, and declining international prices for Bangladesh's prime exports. Ershad has announced strong measures to purge the bureaucracy of corruption and to increase domestic output. The longer term outlook, however, hinges on how successfully the military regime balances economic objectives against political realities. In the meantime, Ershad is counting on Western aid and investment to bail out the country.

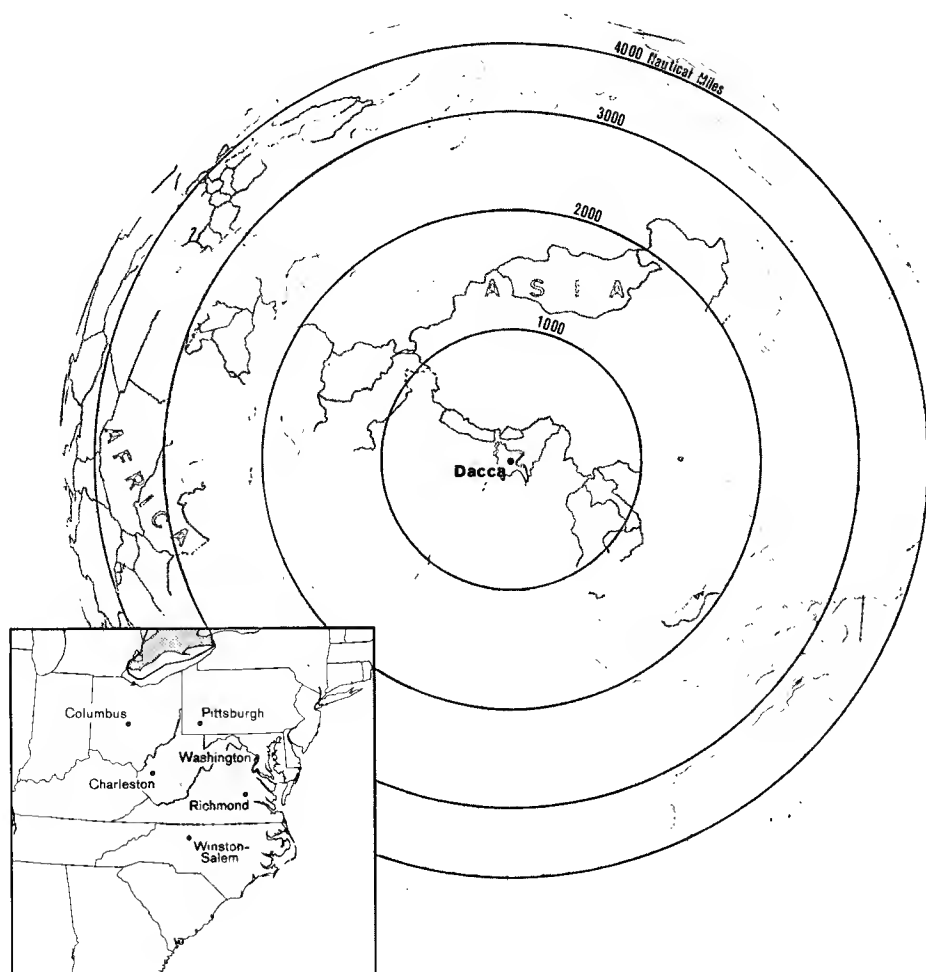
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Figure 1



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## Geography

### Location

About the size of Wisconsin, Bangladesh shares a long land boundary with India on the west, north, and east and a short land and water border with Burma in the southeast. This irregularly shaped, low-lying, riverine country has a total land area of 142,500 square kilometers. It has a northwest-southeast extension of 764 kilometers and an east-west one of 467 kilometers. Its southern seafront runs approximately 580 kilometers along the Bay of Bengal.

### Topography

Except for the Chittagong Hills located in the southeast and the marginally high ground in the northeastern district of Sylhet, the distinguishing topographical characteristic of Bangladesh is its uniformity. Most of the country is a flat, alluvial plain that is an eastern extension of the greater Indo-Gangetic Plain extending across the northern part of South Asia. In sum, the country has been characterized as consisting of old mud, new mud, and marsh.

The dominant topographic feature is a network of rivers that flow generally north to south, with the main river systems being the Ganges-Padma, the Brahmaputra-Jamuna, the Meghna, and the river junction stem and estuary on the Bay of Bengal.<sup>1</sup> This profusion of rivers is both a valuable agricultural resource and a nemesis. Seasonal flooding often subjects Bangladeshis to widespread loss of life, crops, and property and contributes to the severe food shortages that the country almost perennially suffers.

Geography complicates Bangladesh's diplomatic problems because all the large rivers, except for the Meghna in the east, enter the country from India. Consequently, water-sharing questions, such as the continuing Farakka Barrage dispute, loom large in Bangladesh-Indian relations.

<sup>1</sup> The rivers are designated by their different names in India and Bangladesh, for example, Ganges in India and Padma in Bangladesh.

### Climate

Located at about the same latitude as the Bahamas, Bangladesh is warm and humid, with temperatures varying between temperate and tropical. There are basically three seasons: a hot "summer" of high humidity from March to June; a somewhat cooler, but still hot and humid monsoon from June through September or early October; and a cooler, drier "winter" from mid-October to early March.

The average temperature is 29° C, with some seasonal variation. January is the coolest month, with April and May being the hottest. Summer temperatures between 38° C and 41° C are occasionally reported, although a maximum temperature range of 32° C to 36° C is more normal.

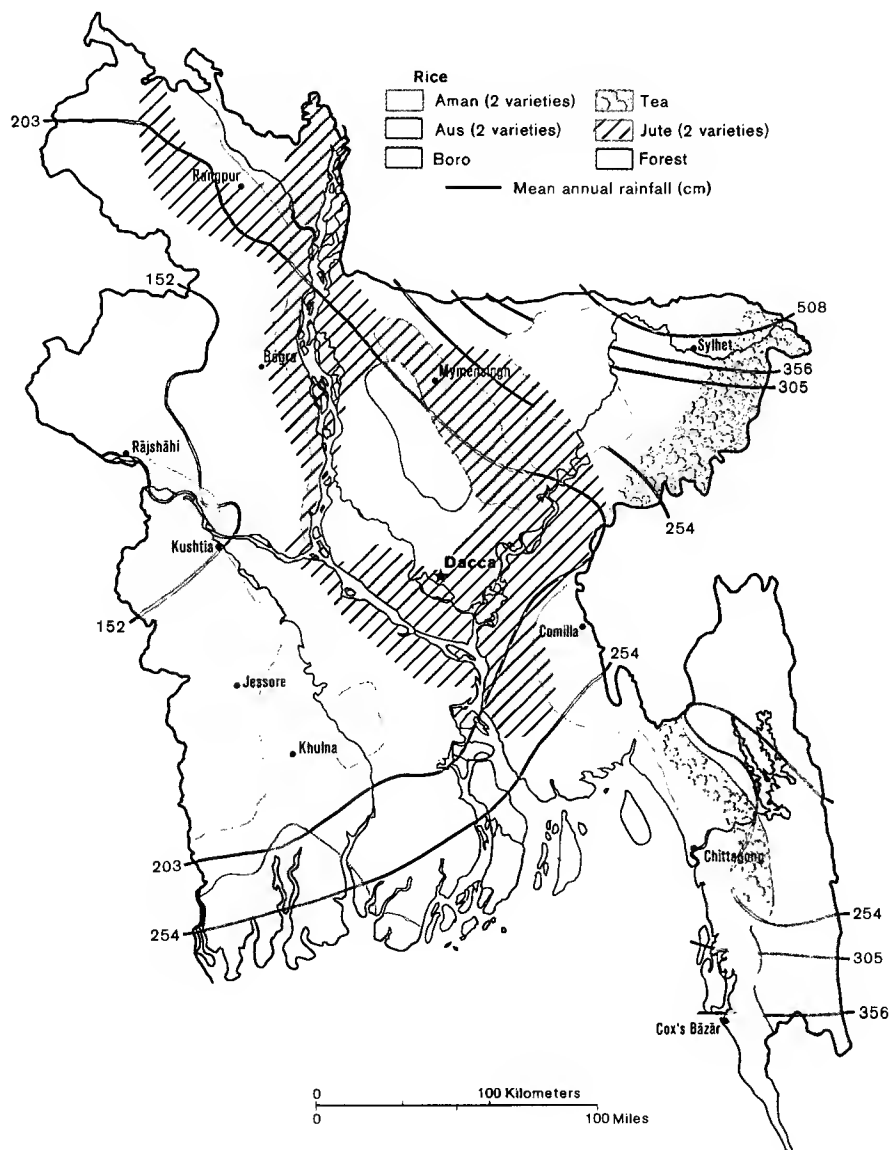
Humidity is high throughout the year. During June and July, relative humidity across the country ranges from 84 to 90 percent. Even during the cooler months of November through February, the humidity range is 75 to 80 percent. The lower delta in Khulna and the Chittagong coast are the most humid regions, although the rest of the country is not far behind.

Annual rainfall averages 215 centimeters and varies from 130 centimeters in the west to 500 centimeters in the region of the Assam hills to the north. Rainfall in the latter location is among the heaviest in the world and subjects much of the area to flooding during the rainy season. About three-fourths of the country's annual rainfall comes from the summer, or southwest, monsoon. Because land travel is difficult in the rainy season, boats are a main source of transportation.

Winds are a significant element of weather in Bangladesh. The most violent are rain-bearing monsoon winds and cyclones off the Bay of Bengal; violent

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**Figure 2**  
**Agriculture and Land Use in Bangladesh**



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thunderstorms called northwesters occurring from March through May; and less frequently, tornadoes in the flatter areas of the country.

#### Natural Resources

**Agriculture.** Agriculture is central to the nation's economy and society. Nearly 90 percent of the population is engaged in either growing, marketing, transporting, or processing agricultural products. The low level of food production is the most glaring agricultural weakness and forces Bangladesh to import substantial amounts of foodgrain. Most of the farming population is occupied with subsistence farming. Until the early 1950s a region relatively well supplied with food, Bangladesh now suffers from too many people on too little land. To exacerbate matters, Bangladesh agriculture faces the dual problem of too much rainfall periodically, which causes flooding of fields, and too little rainfall at other times during the growing seasons. Because additional arable land is practically nonexistent, increased production must be achieved by farming the already cultivated land more intensively and more efficiently. Additional irrigation, drainage, and flood control facilities and an increase in the use of fertilizer and improved seed strains are essential to resolving Bangladesh's food production problems.

**Staple Crops.** Bangladesh's principal crops are rice and jute. The country has three separate rice crops for the different seasons and two different methods of planting rice. The aman rice crop is the main one and is planted during the spring and harvested between November and January. Aus rice is sown during the early April and May rains and is harvested in July and August. Boro rice, the dry season crop, is dependent on irrigation. It is planted after the aman crop and harvested in April and May. Jute, almost as critical as rice to the society's economy, is the main cash crop and is grown almost exclusively for export as fiber or woven goods. Minor crops include tea, sugarcane, oilseeds, fruits, vegetables, spices, wheat, potatoes, tobacco, cotton, and fodder.

**Livestock.** Livestock play a minor role in agriculture and are raised primarily as part of overall farming activity. Cattle and buffalo are used mostly as draft animals, although their milk and meat are consumed as food. Goats, which can scavenge for food, are kept

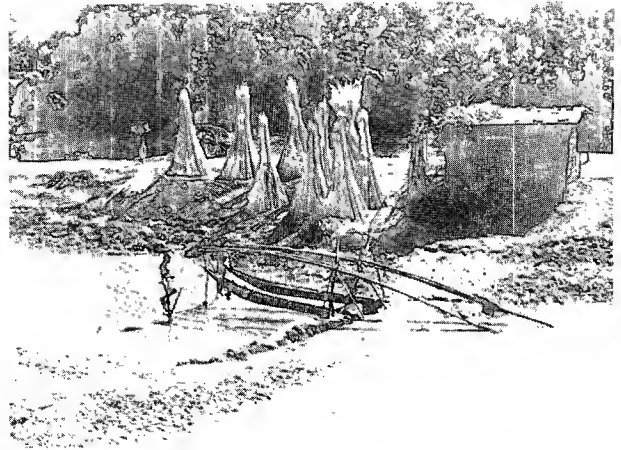


Figure 3. Typical irrigation device used to empty canal in order to harvest fish; jute dries on the bank.

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to increase cash income and to provide limited amounts of meat for farm family consumption. Sheep, relatively few in number, are kept in the wetter areas of the south.

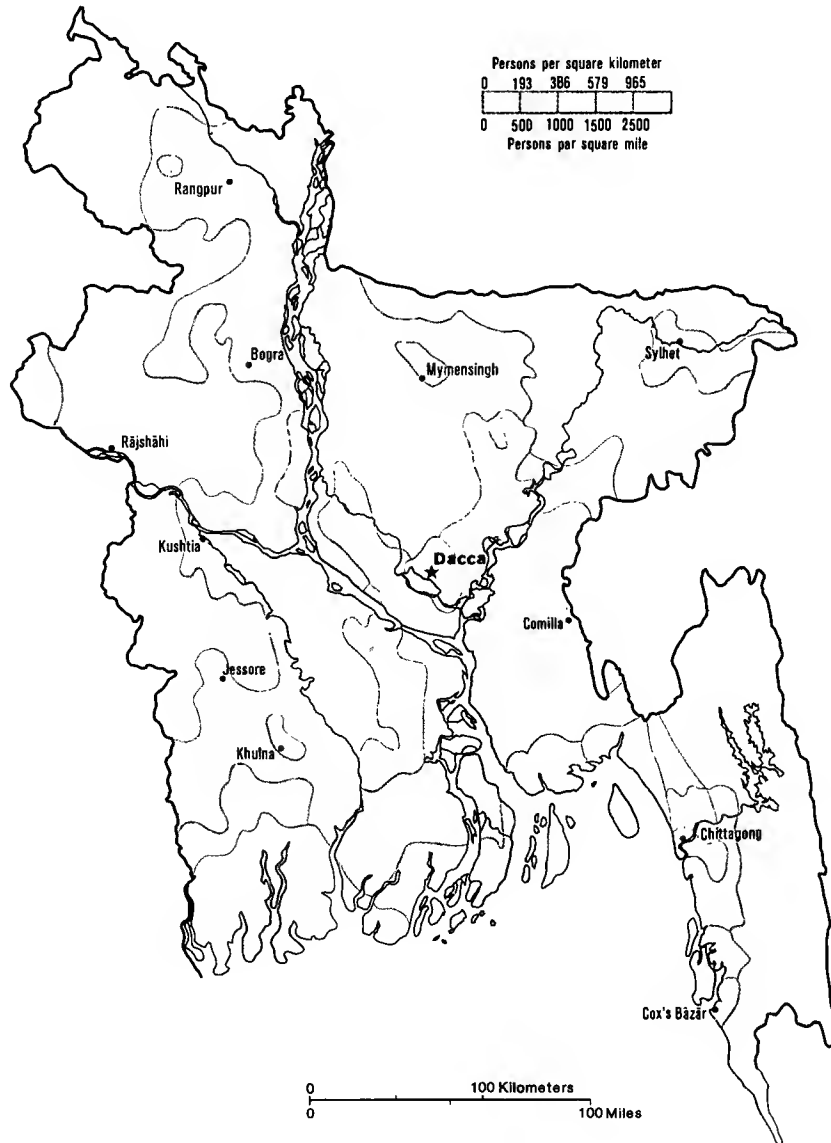
**Fish.** Although Bangladesh, with its many waterways and ponds, began fish culture in ancient times, commercial fishing is not a respected occupation among Bengali Muslims, even though most rural families catch their own. Most commercial fishermen are low-caste Hindus who eke out a bare subsistence. Despite negative cultural attitudes, more than 80 percent of the animal protein in the Bangladesh diet comes from fish, and fish exports are gradually increasing as an important source of foreign exchange earnings.

**Natural Gas and Minerals.** Bangladesh is poorly endowed with mineral resources. Natural gas is its prime energy asset, followed by some unexploited deposits of coal. The Asian Development Bank currently estimates deposits of natural gas to be 9.6 trillion cubic feet (recoverable), and annual consumption of natural gas is about 0.5 percent of this. There are five gasfields, all in the east. Gas from these wells is used for electricity generation, household and commercial uses, and as feedstock for urea manufacture. Coal deposits at Jamalganj near Bogra in the west are estimated at 700 million metric tons by the Asian

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**Figure 4**  
**Population in Bangladesh**



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Figure 5. Pedicabs are the most popular mode of city transportation.

Franz Furst ©

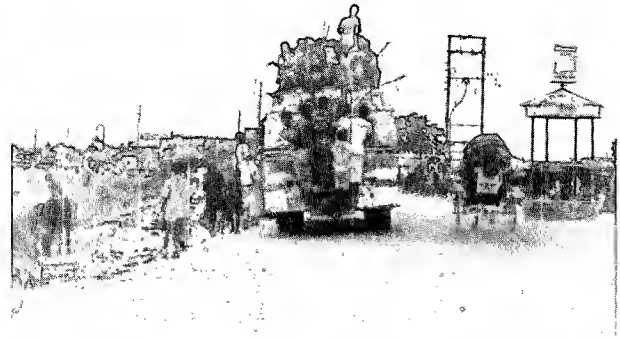


Figure 6. Villagers crowd onto public transport.

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Development Bank but lie at a depth of 2,000 to 3,000 feet. Past geological surveys show that because of technical and economic factors, exploitation is not feasible at current prices.

**Population.** With an estimated population of 93 million in 1982 and a density of about 650 persons per square kilometer, Bangladesh is the world's eighth most populous nation and the most densely populated agricultural country in the world. At current projections of an average annual growth rate of 3.1 percent, by 1985 Bangladesh will increase by 9 million persons. As with other underdeveloped countries, the population is characterized by a young age distribution—44 percent under 15 years of age.

Urbanization is a relatively new phenomenon in Bangladesh. About 88 percent of the population lives in rural areas. (Many of the rural residents—perhaps as much as 50 percent—are landless.) Nevertheless, given increased population pressure on rural lands, the cities are growing fast. The largest city is the capital, Dacca, with nearly 3.5 million inhabitants (see table 1).

Bangladesh's demographic statistics reveal a population in which mortality levels are high, with life expectancy at birth of 48 years; nearly one-fifth of the children die before the age of 5; nearly 16 percent of the children 5 and under suffer from acute and chronic malnutrition, and the growth of another 58

percent is stunted by chronic undernutrition; poverty is pervasive; and only 23 percent of the population is literate.

Bangladesh's family planning program, established in earnest in 1976, ambitiously aims at achieving a replacement level of fertility by 1990.<sup>2</sup> But factors such as traditional religious and cultural biases that favor large families are not conducive to meeting this goal. Table 2 indicates the statistical consequences should attainment of this target be delayed five, 10, or 45 years. The Martial Law Administration has announced a new family planning strategy that entrusts village leaders with motivating villagers to adopt birth control measures. Field workers will be sent to each house to discuss the merits of a small family, a difficult task given the reluctance of a traditional Muslim society that considers birth control against the will of God.

#### Human Geography

**Society.** The name "Bangladesh" means the land, or home, of Bengalis.<sup>3</sup> Although politically divided, Bengalis display an intense cultural homogeneity and tend

<sup>2</sup> Replacement level of fertility is defined as the number of births (about two per couple) at which a population will just reproduce itself, given the level of mortality.

<sup>3</sup> In this handbook, the residents of Bangladesh will be called Bangladeshis to distinguish them from those Bengalis who live in India.

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**Table 1**  
**Population of Municipalities**

Thousands

	1974	1981
Dacca	1,679.6	3,458.6
Chittagong	944.6	1,388.5
Khulna	437.3	623.2
Rajshahi	132.9	171.6
Sylhet	59.5	166.8
Barisal	98.1	159.3
Rangpur	72.8	156.0
Jessore	76.1	149.4
Saidpur	90.1	128.1
Comilla	86.4	126.1
Mymensingh	76.0	107.9
Sirajgonj	74.5	104.5
Pabna	62.2	101.1

Source: Census data as reported in Bangladesh Census Commission.

to view themselves as superior to non-Bengalis. Their legends tell of the exploitation of both land and people by alien rulers and of steadfast and violent Bengali resistance. Bengali culture represents a fusion of influences: nature and animism expressed in folk traditions; Hinduism and Buddhism, followed by Mughal Islam from the medieval period until about 1800; the impact of Western modernism, especially as conveyed by the British presence to 1947; and the nationalist experience since that time.

Bengali society has yet to emerge from its traumatic history sufficiently to develop an effective social elite at the national level or stability in the predominantly rural society. Before the exodus of the Hindu *zamindar* (landlord) elite in the late 1940s following partition and the land reform of the early 1950s, the Hindu *zamindars* provided a framework for a relatively stable, although inequitable, social organization. Hindus controlled the majority of all large rural landholdings, urban real estate, and government jobs in East Bengal and dominated finance, commerce, and the professions. Following the Hindus' departure, upper

**Table 2**  
**Population in the Year 2000**  
**(Under Varying Assumptions)**

	Year in Which Replacement Level Is Achieved			
	1990	1995	2000	2035
Population in the year 2000 (million)	113	117	122	141
Density per sq. km <sup>a</sup>	849	879	917	1,060
Persons per cultivable hectare <sup>b</sup>	1.9	2.0	2.1	2.4
Dependency ratio <sup>c</sup> (percent)	44	47	57	71
Food requirement (million metric tons) <sup>d</sup>	19.8	20.5	21.4	24.7
Children of school age (millions) <sup>e</sup>	19.0	21.5	25.1	34.6
Working-age population (millions) <sup>f</sup>	76.1	77.6	78.4	80.5

<sup>a</sup> Based on an area of 133,040 square kilometers, which excludes river area.

<sup>b</sup> Total cultivable area is taken as 9.3 million hectares—net of uncultivable area and forests.

<sup>c</sup> Ratio of persons in dependent ages, under 15 and over 64, to those in the economically productive years (15 to 64).

<sup>d</sup> Total requirements based on a consumption target of 0.4 kilogram of foodgrains per capita per day plus 10 percent for losses, feed, and seeds.

<sup>e</sup> Children aged 5 to 14.

<sup>f</sup> Working-age population, 15 to 60 years.

Source: World Bank, March 1982.

level positions of control and policymaking fell to the West Pakistanis. Thus, Bangladesh emerged from its war for independence in 1971 without an economic and governmental elite to fill the hastily vacated high-level government and industrial positions.

Most of the country is ethnically uniform, in the sense of being occupied by Bengali-speaking Muslims, but cultural differences by region do exist. The people of the central and southwest delta region dominate among the Bangladeshis socially, culturally, and politically; the people of the trans-Meghna region of the

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east and southeast tend to be more religious, enterprising, and adventurous; and the inhabitants of the northern region are more tolerant of social differences.

The majority of Bangladeshis still live in rural villages of a few hundred to a thousand people. There are some 65,000 villages throughout the country. These clusters of peasant homesteads form hamlets or *paras*, which represent the first level of community structure above that of the family. Residents of neighboring hamlets interact with one another and commonly see themselves as a socially and religiously distinct community, or *samaj*, which may not always correspond geographically to the official village boundaries. Within such a loose structure, the wealthier families tend to exercise predominant social influence.

Few people travel much outside their village except to market. New ideas have little influence and percolate slowly; it is difficult for most rural Bangladeshis to imagine how life can be improved. Bangladeshis, particularly in the rural areas, believe that their lives are governed by *takdir*, viewed as the predestined limits and opportunities bestowed by Allah upon each individual. More positively, however, each person has been granted potentialities by Allah and is expected to attempt to realize them. Bengalis look favorably on the ability to mobilize other persons and to establish social ties with those powerful enough to be instrumental in the achievement of one's ends.

Family and kinship form the core of social life, and groups of kinsmen function to some extent as corporate entities. Following the doctrine of Islam, emphasis is placed on the value of being part of a household or *bari*. The family unit is ideally composed of a man and his wife, his sons and their wives and children, and his unmarried daughters. Distant relatives may board with a family while attending school or working at a job. Divorced daughters and their children and occasionally a married daughter and her husband may take up residence in the father's *bari* and share in the work and food of the family.

Death of the father usually precipitates the separation of adult sons into their own households. Such a split generally causes little change in the physical layout of

the *bari*. The brothers simply divide the fields and other property their father held and used for their common benefit and establish their own common hearth or *cula* where each wife cooks for her own small household. As the brothers' sons grow and marry, the cycle begins again.

**Ethnic and Religious Groups.** Outside of the Bengali Muslim population, there are approximately 13 million Hindus, most of whom are also Bengali, and several hundred thousand tribal peoples in Bangladesh. About three-fourths of the Hindus in Bangladesh are of the Namashudra caste, one of the lowest groups. Most of the rest belong to other formerly untouchable groups. Generally, these Hindus occupy low social and economic positions. Some members of higher castes belong to the middle or professional class, but there is no Hindu upper class. The Hindus are concentrated mainly in the areas bordering India, such as Khulna, Jessore, Sylhet, and Dinajpur, although some are located in the more central district of Faridpur.

The 600,000 or so tribal peoples live mainly in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, where they engage in agriculture. The tribes are racially and culturally more akin to the Burmese. They speak Tibeto-Burman rather than an Indo-European language and are predominantly Buddhists.

**Language.** All but 2 percent of the population speak the official Bangla language. Outside of the cities, English is not widely spoken. Bangla is the easternmost of the broad grouping of Indo-European languages. It is a derivative of the eastern Prakrit subgroup of languages stemming from Sanskrit. The language and its script are identifiable from about 1000 A.D., although some scholars favor a date of about two centuries earlier.

**Religion.** A secular, predominantly Muslim state, Bangladesh derives an important part of its national identity from its religious character. Islam plays a significant role in the country's social structure and has considerable influence on the daily lives of Bangladeshis. Although loyalty to Islam is widespread,

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Figure 7. The Great Mosque is one of the more than 700 mosques in Dacca.

Franz Furst ©

observance varies with social position and geographic location. Adherence to Islamic tenets is more pervasive in the rural areas than in the few large cities where exposure to modern influences is stronger. In the villages religious leaders have a great deal of authority over the moral conduct of Bangladeshis. The *ulama* (religious leaders and scholars) do not perform the official judicial functions they perform in some other Muslim countries. In Bangladesh there are no official *sharia* (Islamic law) courts; rather, the British legal system is used. In matters of personal law, there are local judges or lawyers (*qadis*) whose advice is often sought and followed.

Nearly all of Bangladesh's Muslim population is of the Hanafi sect of Sunni Islam; there are only a few thousand Shiites. Bangladeshis practice Islam somewhat differently from their Arab and Persian coreligionists, primarily because of the influence Hinduism has had upon their culture. Islamic observances are looser, and, particularly among the uneducated and rural populations, belief and practice tend to incorporate elements that vary from, or even conflict with, the teachings of orthodox Islam.

The spread of Islam in East Bengal was more the result of conversion than conquest; dissatisfied with Buddhism and opposed to Hinduism, which put the majority of the population of East Bengal into the lower caste, vast numbers of Bengalis were attracted by the Islamic doctrine of the equality of all men before God. But they retained many of their old rituals and incorporated them into their new faith.

Despite several reform efforts in the 19th century to bring Islamic practices in their country more into conformity with orthodox Islam, Bangladeshis enjoy their religious distinction. Claiming to be as pious as other Muslims, they acknowledge that their observance is less formal but also less prone to fanaticism.

A second element strong in Bangladesh Islam is Sufism, a mystical movement that evolved early in Islamic history as a kind of popular Islam emphasizing love of God rather than the fear of God preached by the *ulama*. Sufism prevails in Bangladesh to a greater extent than in most other Muslim countries because of the convergence of Sufi beliefs with the mysticism influential in much of South Asian culture. During their travels, Sufi teachers came to be venerated as saints (*pirs*), and the tradition of seeking the intercession of *pirs* is still common, particularly in the Chittagong and Sylhet districts. In some areas the shrines of saints almost outnumber the mosques.

At times the functions of the *pirs* and the *ulama* overlap, but in general the two kinds of religious leadership are distinguished by their qualifications. The *ulama* undergo formal training in Islamic law,

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whereas the *pir* gains his powers through various mystical experiences and may have no formal schooling. A Muslim may go to the *pir* for personal inspiration, but he neither wants nor expects the *pir* to lead communal prayers or deliver the weekly sermon.

Islam plays little current role in Bangladesh politics, although it could be used by dissatisfied groups to trigger political opposition. Religion has been an important symbol in East Bengali politics in the past, particularly in the prepartition period when it was used to politicize the predominantly Muslim rural peasantry of East Bengal against their Hindu landlords. During the period of Pakistani rule, however, Bengali politicians became increasingly concerned with what they saw to be West Pakistani threats to their cultural and linguistic heritage, as well as general neglect of Bengali interests, and the defense of these interests superseded Islam as a political rallying point. Today, both Islamic commitment and Bengali ethnicity remain compelling elements in Bangladesh's national identity.

No religious leaders have achieved widespread recognition based entirely on religious credentials. A number of *ulama* have achieved prominence, however, through their participation in party politics. They are viewed as politicians first and religious leaders second. The somewhat apolitical stance of the *ulama* has been attributed to the British colonial policy of removing religious instruction from the educational mainstream, with the result that most students are taught only secular subjects. The limited political and financial support given to Islamic political parties and the political noninvolvement of Islamic social and religious organizations are contributing factors.

**Education.** The productivity of Bangladesh's labor force is severely limited by the constraints and shortcomings of the educational system. About 77 percent of Bangladesh's population is illiterate, and only 5 percent of its labor force has graduated from high school or an institution of higher learning. Attempts at large-scale functional literacy programs have been largely unsuccessful because the curriculum does not relate to the participants' needs. Those involved have

not been convinced of the benefits, and insufficient attention has been paid to overall planning and coordination.

The basic structure of the formal educational system has remained almost unchanged since 1947, except for limited expansion of technical education. Development plans since independence have attempted to meet educational shortcomings by increasing the number of trained teachers for primary and secondary schools, strengthening science education, emphasizing vocational and technical education, making higher education more selective, introducing adult literacy programs, and giving special attention to female education. The main institutions of higher learning are the six universities—four comprehensive located in Dacca, Chittagong, Rajshahi, and Savar and two technical in Dacca and Mymensingh. As of 1977, the universities had nearly 28,000 students.

The government's failures to fulfill its plans and its lack of commitment to educational development have been the primary reasons for the lack of educational improvement. The Bangladesh Government will have to improve the quality of instruction, correct the serious imbalance between the curriculum and the skill needs of the economy, and eliminate inadequate management in order to tackle the basic flaws of the existing educational system.

**Health.** As a result of poor nutrition and sanitation, Bangladeshis suffer from a variety of diseases, and mortality levels are high. Medical services are inadequate to take care of the country's health problems. Bangladesh is one of the few countries in the world where males have a lower mortality rate than females, mainly the result of high female mortality in the childbearing years. Projected life expectancies at birth for males are 49.9 years and for females 47.3 years. Young children suffer disproportionately from diseases, accounting for 40 percent of deaths annually. The major cause of child death is a series of severe

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diarrheas. Infectious diseases such as malaria and tuberculosis afflict a significant proportion of the population.

Although Bangladesh ranks above comparable low-income countries such as Kampuchea, Ethiopia, and Mali in life expectancy, it falls below regional neighbors India and Pakistan in the number of available physicians. According to 1977 World Bank data, calorie intake levels for all three South Asian countries are similar.

To alleviate the shortage of doctors, the military government has banned Bangladesh doctors from seeking overseas employment prior to serving in rural areas of Bangladesh for a minimum of five years. Only a small number of the doctors who complete their service in rural areas will be allowed to emigrate.



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Economy

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## Economy

Neither nature nor circumstance has favored the fragile Bangladesh economy. Overwhelmingly agricultural, Bangladesh depends heavily on a semitropical monsoon climate. A minor shift in rainfall patterns can spell the difference between famine and sufficiency. Central to Bangladesh's poverty is the rapidly expanding population and a production structure that has been unable to keep pace. Unrelenting population growth in turn has forced Bangladeshis to farm all available land, although traditional agricultural techniques and yields remain relatively unchanged. In addition, the economy has undergone several major political disruptions over the past few decades.

Bangladesh's economic institutions are still embryonic. Economic policy was formulated in London and Calcutta during colonial rule and in West Pakistan between 1947 and 1971. Priority was not given by either center to the development of the area that is now Bangladesh. Pakistan's efforts for promoting economic growth in the area were made through a series of five-year plans that emphasized industrial development, irrigation, and multiple cropping to increase cultivated acreage. The economy grew, but the population grew even faster, and the growth in agricultural output did not benefit most Bangladeshis. Pakistan's emphasis on industrialization was also unfavorable for East Pakistan because of the lack of natural resources to support industries and the need to find productive employment for the rapidly growing labor force. The problems of declining rural incomes, a heavy dependence on imports, and an unfavorable balance of payments were partly hidden prior to independence by the flow of goods between West and East Pakistan because the trade was in a common currency and largely exempt from outside competition. When this link was broken and foreign trade had to be conducted in world markets, the import dependence and balance-of-payments problems became immediately apparent.

From its inception in 1971, the war-beleaguered nation was faced with the resettlement of some 10 million war refugees, a transportation and communications network in need of extensive repair, and the transformation of government from a provincial to a national administration, with the added burden of increased staffing requirements following the nationalization of most industries and banks and the departure of West Pakistani businessmen. Early on, poor harvests and devastating floods, scarcity of goods, inflation, declining real wages, rapid population growth, and labor unrest heightened existing economic problems and encouraged political instability.

Little could be done to counteract the balance-of-payments crisis in the early years except to attempt to economize in imports and increase jute export prices, already depressed by the competition of synthetics. To make matters worse, neither export performance nor the inflow of aid lived up to expectations. The first five-year plan (1973-78) had to be scrapped and replaced by a scaled-down program (1976-78) in response to the enormous economic difficulties.

During 1976-81 Bangladesh emerged from a period of dismal slump to one of limited progress, fueled by heavier aid inflows and relative political stability under President Ziaur Rahman, under whose leadership the ambitious second five-year plan (1980-85) was formulated. Zia's economic policy was simple and, for the most part, pragmatic. Some 220 smaller enterprises nationalized by the Awami League were returned to private ownership, although Zia did not denationalize the large and more profitable jute and textile industries, which partly offset the benefits of his policy aimed at encouraging foreign investment. During 1976-81 real gross domestic product (GDP) increased at an average annual rate of 5 percent. The most important gains were in agriculture, with food-grain production increasing substantially. Despite the

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influx of \$5.2 billion in foreign aid, real per capita income rose only slightly, primarily as a result of high population growth.

### Growth Trends

Despite muted economic prosperity, the growth prior to Zia's assassination masked structural problems such as unbalanced sector growth, stagnation in industrial productivity, low investment, and inadequate infrastructure and tax base. Bangladesh currently faces serious budgetary and balance-of-payments problems. The financing of larger foodgrain stockpiles and additional storage facilities in FY 1980/81 contributed to Bangladesh's financial difficulties by placing an unexpected strain on the national budget at a time when foreign aid disbursements were falling below the Bangladesh Government's planning estimates. The aid picture has been further clouded by the International Monetary Fund's (IMF) withdrawal of funding for a stabilization program, prompted by Dacca's fiscal irresponsibility under President Sattar.

The national budget remains under stress, owing mainly to large increases in the food budget and to shortfalls in revenue from subsidized foodstuffs and commodity aid receipts below budget levels (see table 3). No real economic growth was achieved during the fiscal year that ended 30 June 1982, compared to the previous year's rise of 7.4 percent.

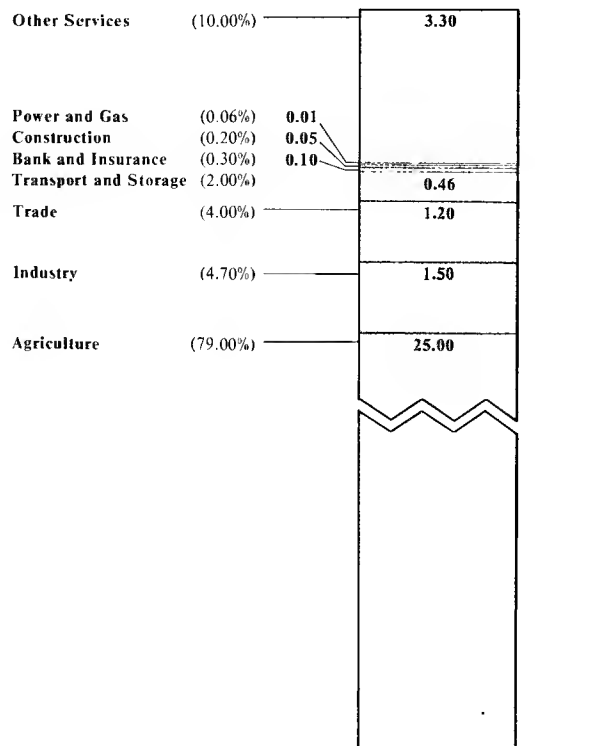
### Income and Employment

Within a small and already overcrowded land area, the faltering economy of Bangladesh is further burdened by a huge, rapidly growing population, almost half of which is under 15 years of age. With an extremely low per capita income of \$140, an increase of only \$70 since 1975, Bangladesh is one of the world's poorest countries.

The population problem has given rise to unemployment and underemployment, which affect about a third of the labor force. The size of the labor force in 1981 was estimated at 32.4 million, and net labor growth throughout the 1980s will reach unprecedented levels. Figure 8 gives a breakdown of the country's employment. Nearly 80 percent of the largely malnourished, unskilled, and uneducated labor force is

**Figure 8**  
**Bangladesh: Employment by Sector**

Employed (millions)



Source: US Embassy, Dacca, June 1982

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employed in agriculture, where underemployment prevails. Wages and productivity in the small industrial sector are low.

Unemployment is hard to measure, according to World Bank and US Embassy reports. Official Bangladesh statistics cite an unemployment rate of 11 percent, compared to USAID estimates of nearly 30 percent, which include disguised unemployment and

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**Table 3**  
**Bangladesh: Balance of Payments**

Million US \$

	FY 1977	FY 1978	FY 1979	FY 1980	FY 1981	FY 1982 <sup>a</sup>	FY 1983 <sup>a</sup>
<b>Trade balance</b>	<b>-405</b>	<b>-852</b>	<b>-922</b>	<b>-1,685</b>	<b>-1,773</b>	<b>-1,770</b>	<b>-2,085</b>
Exports (free on board)	460	497	611	687	751	650	595
Imports (cost, insurance, and freight)	-865	-1,349	-1,533	-2,372	-2,524	-2,420	-2,680
Net services	-29	-32	-27	3	11	-70	-120
Workers' remittances	81	113	143	210	365	400	450
<b>Current account balance</b>	<b>-353</b>	<b>-771</b>	<b>-806</b>	<b>-1,472</b>	<b>-1,397</b>	<b>-1,440</b>	<b>-1,755</b>
Amortization	30	37	57	66	45	55	73
<b>Foreign capital requirements</b>	<b>383</b>	<b>808</b>	<b>863</b>	<b>1,538</b>	<b>1,442</b>	<b>1,495</b>	<b>1,828</b>
Financed by:							
Grant and grant-like flows	265	393	553	686	542	620	660
Medium- and long-term loans (net)	238	398	420	470	560	550	610
Other capital flows (net)	-26	-2	-2	106	59	105	
Changes in reserves	27	44	76	87	26		
Errors and omissions	-35	-62	-27	41	26		-23
<b>Surplus/Deficit (-)</b>	<b>86</b>	<b>-37</b>	<b>157</b>	<b>-148</b>	<b>-229</b>	<b>-220</b>	<b>-535</b>

<sup>a</sup> Estimated.

Sources: World Bank, 1982 and IMF documents, 1982.

underemployment. The Asian Development Bank reports that only 1.6 million new jobs were created between 1977 and 1980, while new entrants to the labor force totaled 3 to 4 million. The second five-year plan optimistically projects the creation of 5.2 million new jobs by 1985, of which 3.2 million are to be in agriculture and 600,000 in small-scale and cottage industries. Nonetheless, combined domestic finances and foreign assistance are insufficient to deal with impending labor force growth.

The export of Bangladesh manpower, particularly to the Middle East, is an important source of foreign exchange and a partial short-term solution to the current unemployment problem. The Martial Law Administration plans to encourage labor migration.

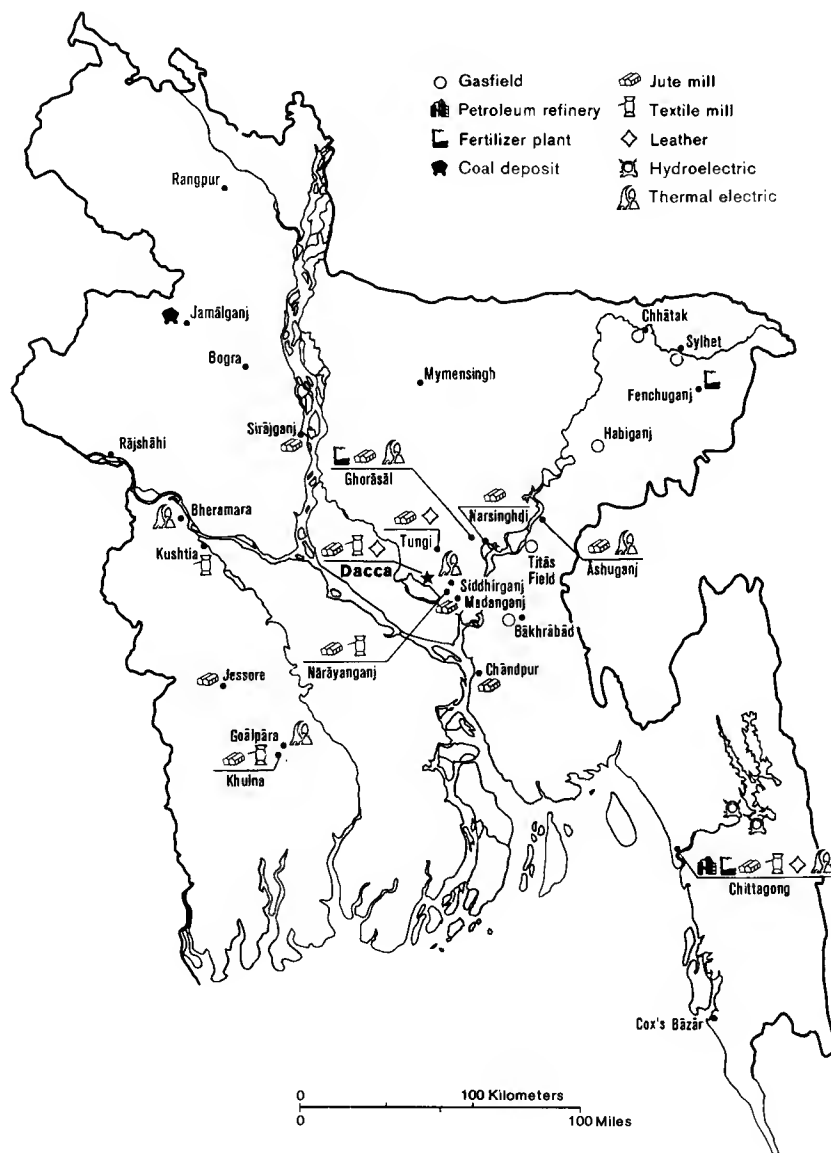
### Main Sectors of the Economy

**Agriculture.** Agricultural output accounts for more than 55 percent of Bangladesh's GDP. Jute is the most important cash crop for Bangladesh farmers and provides income for a large number of landless laborers. Rice is the main foodcrop. Wheat and potatoes are minor crops of increasing importance due to governmental emphasis. Relatively small amounts of sugarcane and tea are also grown.

Although agricultural production levels continue to be highly dependent on weather, some gains are being made in reducing the vulnerability of crops to weather damage. Bangladesh has fertile soil and great potential for increased food production through the provision of more irrigation and drainage and flood control,



**Figure 9**  
**Fuel, Industry, and Power in Bangladesh**



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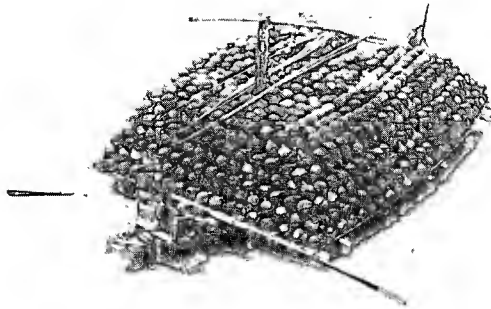


Figure 10. Boat traffic is the primary means of transporting goods to market; these newly made clay water jugs are being taken to Dacca for sale.

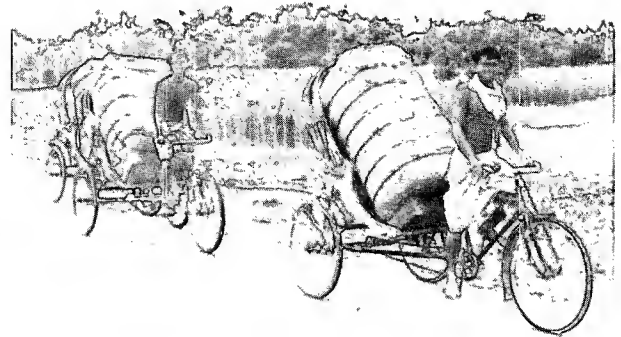


Figure 11. Pedicabs and oxcarts pulled by men are common methods of transporting goods by road.

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which is a necessary condition for facilitating the efficient use of fertilizer and high-yield varieties of grain.

**Industry.** The industrial sector contributed approximately 8.4 percent of Bangladesh's GDP in FY 1980/81 and consists primarily of the manufacture of jute goods, with textiles playing an important secondary role. Domestic fertilizer production is of growing importance to both the industrial and agricultural sectors. Smaller industries include newsprint, leather goods, pharmaceuticals, and chemicals. Although a shift toward the private sector has developed over the past five years, the public sector still predominates.

**Gas.** Bangladesh has substantial quantities of natural gas located in the eastern part of the country. In the absence of a cross-country gas pipeline, the western part is almost totally dependent on the use of petroleum products for power generation and industrial energy. Total reserves in one offshore and eight inland fields are conservatively estimated at nearly 10 trillion cubic feet. Two fertilizer plants using natural gas are now operating, and another is under construction. No domestic oil has been discovered, although foreign companies have drilled offshore exploratory wells in recent years.

### Transportation and Communications

Topography, insufficient financial resources, and shortages of maintenance personnel and equipment have retarded the development of an adequate transportation network. The country's flat terrain and numerous river systems are the basis for 7,000 kilometers of inland waterways, which account for most of the movement of goods and people. The rivers, however, have inhibited the development of road and rail transportation. Adding to the difficulties of constructing new travel routes, road and rail embankments may block natural drainage and introduce additional flooding. Thus, in contrast to its more numerous river routes, Bangladesh has only slightly more than 4,000 kilometers of paved highway and roughly the same amount of railroad. Most rail lines in Bangladesh, built largely under British rule, run north-south, following the natural course of the rivers. Bangladesh Biman is the national airline, with the principal airport being the new Zia International Airport located 10 kilometers west of Dacca. Bangladesh has a fairly efficient domestic wire, microwave, and broadcast service, although there is an average of only 0.1 telephone per 100 persons.

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**Foreign Assistance**

Given its inadequate economic structure, low domestic savings, and massive trade deficit, foreign aid is essential to Bangladesh's economy. According to the US Embassy, net aid disbursement to Bangladesh during 1976-81 totaled \$5.2 billion. Bangladesh has been the recipient of food aid of about \$200 million per annum in normal years and close to \$400 million per annum during the poor crop years of FY 1975 and FY 1980.

Bangladesh receives aid from several contributors. According to the IMF, in 1980-81 about 85 percent of external aid to Bangladesh was provided by international organizations and countries belonging to the Bangladesh Aid Group. Member countries include Australia, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, West Germany, Italy, Japan, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Japan was the largest bilateral donor followed by the United States, West Germany, Canada, and the United Kingdom; these five countries accounted for over 42 percent of total aid disbursements. Other donors include Middle Eastern countries, particularly Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, and various Communist countries (see table 4).

**Foreign Trade and Balance of Payments**

Bangladesh faces persistent balance-of-payments and foreign exchange problems caused by a massive trade deficit, due in part to the present recession in the world jute market. Bangladesh has not yet developed a sufficiently diversified export sector capable of counterbalancing the fluctuations in jute export earnings and the high price of petroleum imports, upon which it must spend 70 percent of its export earnings to meet domestic energy needs. Bangladesh recorded a trade deficit for FY 1981/82 of \$1.8 billion, roughly the same as the previous year's deficit.

Bangladesh's major trading partners in exports are the United States (14 percent) and the USSR (8 percent); major import trade partners are the United States (19 percent) and Japan (12 percent).

The official exchange rate is the equivalent of 20.4 taka per US dollar, according to the IMF.

**Table 4**  
**Aid Donors, FY 1980/81**

Million US \$

Source	Food	Project	Commodity	Total
<b>International and private organizations</b>				
Asian Development Bank		164.3		164.3
European Economic Community	22.0	9.6	3.3	34.9
Ford Foundation		1.0		1.0
International Development Association		269.0	65.0	334.0
Islamic Development Bank		10.0		10.0
OPEC		21.0		21.0
UN organizations	30.0	35.0		65.0
UNICEF		18.0		18.0
<b>Individual countries</b>				
Australia	16.8	1.3	1.9	20.0
Canada		22.5	17.4	39.9
China		16.7		16.7
Denmark		16.8	2.4	19.2
Finland		1.2	2.0	3.2
France	2.0	64.2	3.8	70.0
Iraq		30.0		30.0
Japan	40.3	94.0	97.7	232.0
Kuwait		41.2		41.2
Netherlands	5.0	44.0	35.0	84.0
Norway		10.4	12.0	22.4
Saudi Arabia <sup>a</sup>				
Sweden		13.6	12.4	26.0
Switzerland		2.7	7.5	10.2
United Kingdom	6.0			6.0
United States	72.8	72.6	36.4	181.8
USSR		70.2		70.2
West Germany	8.0	20.0	40.0	68.0

<sup>a</sup> Although Saudi Arabia contributed \$505 million between 1974 and 1982, no data are available indicating whether donor aid was provided in FY 1980/81.

Source: Bangladesh Ministry of Finance, 1981.



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### **Current Economic Policy**

In an attempt to arrest the decline in Bangladesh's economy, the Ershad government has called for ambitious economic reforms. A key proposal in Ershad's program is significantly greater private-sector participation and reduced public-sector activity, a departure from the previous emphasis on a gradual increase in private-sector involvement.

The most important, but perhaps most controversial, aspect of Ershad's policy changes is the emphasis on consumer austerity, which will lead to a temporary drop in the already low standard of living. A sizable rise in consumer prices, such as the doubling of public transportation fares and substantial increases in the cost of food and fuel, are economically sensible in the long term but politically risky over the shorter term. Ershad needs to win workers' trust to implement these announced policy changes. Given the current popular attitude of uncertainty and growing skepticism, such support may be slow in coming.



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Political  
Situation

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## Political Situation

Although some 3,000 years of recorded history precede the existence of modern-day Bangladesh, the country has been a separate nation only since December 1971, following a bloody nine-month civil war between East and West Pakistan. Previously the area was known as East Bengal under the British Indian state of Bengal and as East Pakistan or the East Wing after the partition of India in 1947. Bengali resistance to alien political rule often has been stubborn and violent. Even the chronicles of Mughal Empire historians refer to Bengal not only as an excellent source of war elephants, but also as a region in which whole armies were obliterated. Under British rule, Bengali Muslim representation in the British Indian Army and civil service was slight, as their loyalty was questionable.

After Pakistan was established in 1947, Bengalis continued to play a minor role in the new government. Bengalis responded to domination by West Pakistan with agitation for provincial and cultural autonomy and played a major part in organizing the Awami League in 1949 in opposition to the ruling Muslim League. In January 1971 the Awami League won an overwhelming political victory in East Pakistan but almost no support in West Pakistan in the country's first direct general elections. Although the League had a majority in the National Assembly, then Pakistan People's Party leader Zulfikar Ali Bhutto questioned the League's ability to form a government. On 25 March 1971 following unsuccessful negotiations between the League and West Pakistani leaders, the Pakistani Army moved to suppress the League. Sheikh Mujib was arrested, but Ziaur Rahman, then a Pakistani military officer, declared Bangladesh independence. During the ensuing civil war, the Bangladesh Awami League existed as a mass party unifying a variety of disparate elements under the banner of Bengali nationalism.

The war increased tensions between India and Pakistan. Despite appeals by third parties for restraint, open hostilities between the two states began in late November 1971. By early December the Pakistani

Air Force attacked military targets in northern India. India retaliated by launching a ground, air, and naval invasion of East Pakistan, closing in on Dacca. On 16 December Pakistani forces surrendered in Dacca, and the new but heavily war-damaged nation of Bangladesh emerged.

### Political Succession

During Bangladesh's 11 years of political independence three of the country's leaders have been assassinated, and military coup attempts have been numerous (see table 5). When Sheikh Mujibur Rahman returned to Dacca from imprisonment in Pakistan in early January 1972, a new government was formed with Mujib as Prime Minister. Although the government was nominally headed by the President, actual executive authority was exercised by the Prime Minister.

On 25 January 1975 an amendment to the constitution created a presidential system and allowed for the establishment of a one-party state. All political parties were abolished and a single new party created. The judicial system and parliament were modified, and Mujib assumed the presidency. Promised political reforms were slow in coming, however, and Mujib's policies came under increasing criticism. In a coup in August 1975 Mujib was killed by junior army officers bent on ending what had become a corrupt, ineffective, and violence-plagued government.

A second military coup followed in November 1975, with a countercoup ensuing only four days later. Following this chaotic power shuffle, Army Chief of Staff General Ziaur Rahman (Zia) emerged as the new leader of Bangladesh and instituted a martial law administration. Zia pledged the Army's obedience to the civilian government under Chief Justice A. S. M. Sayem. President Sayem declared himself Chief Martial Law Administrator and appointed the heads of the three services as deputy chiefs. He replaced the

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**Table 5**  
**Chronology of Leadership Accession (1971-82)**

	Dates of Leadership	Domestic Policy	Foreign Policy	Termination
President and Prime Minister Sheikh Mujibur Rahman (Mujib)	March 1971–August 1975	Based on four principles of nationalism, democracy, socialism, and secularism; rehabilitation and reconstruction of war-ravaged economy and society; created one-party state.	Pro-Indian and pro-Soviet.	Assassinated in coup by middle-level officers.
President Khondokar Mush-taque Ahmed	August 1975–3 November 1975	Banned political activity.	Moved away from India.	Removed in bloodless military coup as a result of "corruption."
Maj. Gen. Khalid Mushar-raf	3 November–6 November 1975		Pro-Indian and pro-Soviet.	Assassinated in countercoup as a result of enlisted men's mutiny.
Chief Martial Law Administrator (CMLA) and President Abu Sadat Mohammad Sayem	6 November 1975–29 November 1976 as CMLA, although he was figurehead to Zia; remained as President until April 1977	Replaced cabinet with advisory council; promised elections by February 1977.	Set stage for Zia's policies.	Resigned for health reasons.
Chief Martial Law Administrator and President Maj. Gen. Ziaur Rahman (Zia)	November 1976–May 1981; confirmed President in a May 1977 referendum and formally elected President in June 1978	Restored democratic/civilian government; held parliamentary elections February 1979; initiated energetic economic and development program that emphasized self-sufficiency in food and family planning; allowed restricted reorganization of political parties.	Moved further away from India and USSR and closer to China and US; increased ties to Islamic countries; became active in Nonaligned Movement.	Assassinated in coup attempt.
President Abdus Sattar	November 1981–March 1982	Failed to develop economic and political reforms.	Followed same foreign policies as President Zia.	Removed in bloodless coup.
Chief Martial Law Administrator Lt. Gen. Hussain Mohammad Ershad	March 1982–	Anticorruption drive; streamlining bureaucracy; wants to make industry more productive and reform legal system; wants to use thanas or rural areas as focus of local government.	Conservative; pro-Western; pro-Chinese; pro-Islamic; wants to establish closer relations with Pakistan.	

Cabinet with an advisory council composed of politically uninvolved civilian officials and military officers. Parliament was dissolved, and new elections were promised by February 1977. Although President Sayem retained the civil authority, he was only a figurehead; real power was held by General Zia.

Under Zia, the political and military structure became more intertwined. In November 1976 General Zia declared himself Chief Martial Law Administrator. He further consolidated his authority in May

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1977, when he was confirmed President by a referendum after Sayem retired in ill health, and in February 1979 when a new parliament, dominated by Zia's Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) was elected. Zia obtained the support of the military elite by giving coveted high-level positions to some of his former military colleagues. He further politicized the military by supporting promilitary civilian candidates to the National Assembly. The result was that major government policies required the tacit, if not direct, approval of the military leadership.

During the ensuing two-year period, political polarization in the military set in. A rift between the officer corps and some discontented enlisted men, who eventually mutinied, forced Zia to begin diffusing power in the armed forces. Zia's concurrent steps to secure the loyalty of radical-leaning officers and enlisted men by granting blanket pardons and giving them positions of trust in the Army encouraged opportunism among these elements.

On 30 May 1981, while on a visit to the port city of Chittagong, Zia was killed during a coup attempt. Those responsible were a longtime rival, Maj. Gen. Muhammad Abul Manzoor, and a group of young officers whom Zia had reputedly refused to discipline despite persistent recommendations from senior military advisers. The attempted coup failed, and the major conspirators were arrested and executed.

An orderly transfer of power seemed unlikely in the aftermath of Zia's assassination. Army intervention to restore order after the arrest of the coup plotters appeared imminent as Acting President Sattar was seriously ill. Nonetheless, although Army Chief of Staff Ershad deployed troops throughout the country prior to the presidential election in November 1981, the Army limited itself to maintaining order during the polling. Sattar won a surprisingly large victory running as a BNP compromise candidate in an unusually calm and fair election.

In early 1982 rising tension between President Sattar and members of the BNP over Army demands for more power led to a military takeover. The military had become increasingly dissatisfied with the elderly Sattar and his reluctance to deal with Bangladesh's severe economic problems. By February the real

authority in Bangladesh was the military, although Ershad initially hesitated to move directly against the government.

On 24 March Ershad orchestrated a bloodless coup, declared martial law, and assumed the position of Chief Martial Law Administrator. The President, Vice President, Prime Minister, Cabinet ministers, and speaker of the parliament were removed from office. Parliament was dissolved, and the constitution was suspended. Activity among Bangladesh's numerous political parties was banned. Although a figure-head civilian president, retired judge Abul Fazal Mohammad Ahsanuddin Choudhury, was installed, effective political power was in the hands of the military.

#### **Ershad's Programs and Staying Power**

The current Bangladesh Government is in a state of political transition as Ershad attempts to consolidate his authority and establish political legitimacy for the Martial Law Administration (MLA). Although Ershad initially disclaimed any intention of becoming a "politician in uniform" and promised a restoration of civilian political activity within six months and elections within two years, a return to civilian authority is currently unlikely.

Decisions in the military government are made collegially, and Ershad needs a consensus among senior military officers to govern. Even if Ershad wanted to restore broader political participation, his military colleagues probably would be reluctant to go along. Army officers, including Ershad, have proclaimed that the Army must have a decisive political role in the government.

In Ershad's attempts to solidify his power, he has promoted an ambitious campaign to eradicate corruption in politics and business, streamline and decentralize government operations, reform the country's legal system, and establish more pragmatic economic policies. In keeping with these intentions, government ministries have been consolidated and the number of ministers cut in half; Dacca's diplomatic representation has been reduced; many former ministers have

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been arrested for taking bribes, breach of trust, misappropriation of public funds, and abuse of official power; and the judicial system has been suspended in favor of martial law courts.

At first the martial law government seemed generally accepted as a necessary evil in the hope that it could tackle political and economic problems more effectively than the previous government. More recently,

there has been some popular resentment and skepticism of Army rule, and most people want to believe that the situation is temporary. Overly hasty and ill-handled implementation of the government's reforms, which have affected every section of society, are contributing to previously existing bureaucratic chaos.

Ershad's hold on power is fragile, and his survivability is still questionable. His political longevity is dependent on three Herculean tasks: his capability to implement his reforms rapidly, his ability to survive the behind-the-scenes jockeying for power going on within the military hierarchy, and the elimination of Ershad's questionable financial dealings that are eroding his credibility. Ershad himself has no popular base, and much of his military support stems from disgust with the ineffectiveness of the displaced Sattar government.

### Structure of Government

**Military Presence.** The political structure that has evolved since the coup in March 1982 is still unsteady and fractious. General Ershad's leadership has involved extensive consultation with a key group of advisory ministers, most of whom are military officers. Major decisions are based on the consensus of a select group of "ruling generals." Reportedly, no one general, including Ershad, can make major decisions without the approval of the others. The two chiefs of the Air Force and Navy have been named Deputy Martial Law Administrators.

Middle-level officers are capable of influencing MLA decisions. Ershad has been responsive to junior officer concerns, and communication is fairly extensive among senior and junior officers and possibly senior noncommissioned officers. In addition, a consulting mechanism provides the *jawans* (enlisted men) with a channel for airing their views.

Special martial law courts have been set up to deal with corruption and criminal offenses, and the country's bar association has been dissolved. Although the civilian courts have not been disbanded, the new special courts may preempt the jurisdiction of the civilian courts and try offenses punishable under either martial law regulations or civilian law.

**Civilian Administrative Reforms.** Ershad has appointed active duty officers to civilian administrative posts, judicial offices, and task forces. Part of his intent may be to educate impatient officers in the practical problems involved in resolving complex government issues; it also may be an attempt to satisfy the Army's increasing desire for more power. Various sources indicate that Army infiltration of civilian positions has antagonized civilian government employees.

Streamlining and decentralizing the civilian bureaucracy and improving public services are major topics of MLA pronouncements. The number of government ministries has been reduced from 41 to 20. The number of assistant and deputy commissioners for each district has been limited to three, and the elected Dacca municipal corporation has been dissolved. A surge of regulations concerning the conduct of civil service employees has caused muted protests, demoralization, and fear among civilian officials. Vigilance teams headed by military officers have been set up to enforce work hours; dress codes have been established; benefits, such as the use of government vehicles and telephones, have been limited to high-ranking officials; and the retirement age for civil service employees has been set at 57.

Among Ershad's most ambitious reforms is an initiative to restructure Bangladesh's local government around the *thana*, or grass-roots level. By centering government at this level, Ershad hopes to tackle Bangladesh's enormous economic problems where they originate (see box). Local authority will be vested in a three-tier political structure consisting of the district (*zilla*), the town (*thana*) parishad (council), and

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**Local Government in Bangladesh**

<b>Division</b>	—The four divisions (Chittagong, Dacca, Khulna, and Rajshahi) pre-date independence. Headed by commissioners, they have not functioned as an important level of administration for some time, as their size precludes their effectiveness.	—The union parishads are responsible for overseeing local taxation and allocating central government funds for rural works projects. —After 1977, the reputation of the union parishads was tarnished because of the control of the parishads by relatively wealthy local farmers who often misused the councils in their own interest. —The most recent five-year mandate for elected union parishad chairmen expired in February 1982, but the incumbents will remain in office until new elections are held.
<b>Districts</b>	—Currently, 21 districts are headed by deputy commissioners. —Each district is to consist of 6-7 million persons. —The level of influence is to be reduced by thana-level government.	
<b>Thanas</b> (rural townships, literally police stations)	—Thanas are to become the new focus of government operations, under which eight to 10 union parishads are grouped. —The revision will consist of 370 thanas of 250,000 persons each. —Directly elected thana chairmen, who will preside over a thana council, will advise development and administrative officials assigned to thana-level positions.	<b>Gram Sarkar</b> (single village government) —This concept was created under former President Zia and emphasizes village self-reliance. —Each village is supposed to have some five interest groups (that is, farmers, women, youth, landless) that elect two representatives to a village government presided over by an elected president or prodhan. —These units have been dissolved as the new government finds them too small to be effective and frequently in conflict with the larger union parishads. The functions have been transferred to the union parishads.
<b>Union Parishad</b> (village councils)	—Each of the 4,470 or so unions, which consist of about 15 villages each, is governed by a locally elected chairman who sits on the thana council.	

the village (union) parishad. Under the new system, the village, town, and district parishad chairmen will be elected. The village parishads will become increasingly important in the implementation of local projects.

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Opposition

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## Opposition

Factionalism, opposition to authority, and violence are basic to Bangladesh politics. Most political alliances are transitory, and regroupings are frequent.

### Political Parties

Since the imposition of martial law in March, political party activity has been banned. Initially Ershad had talked about the possibility of resuming limited political activity within six months. More recently, however, he opined that political parties, while very much a part of the national landscape, merely seek power and have little ideological basis. According to US Embassy reporting, Ershad envisions a multiparty system in which the number of parties is limited by being required to poll a certain minimum number of votes in elections.

The military seems to be moving toward a more permanent and institutionalized role in politics that is likely to downgrade the influence of political parties even after civilian political activity is allowed to resume. The ability of existing political parties to become a strong mechanism of opposition to the military government will be circumscribed by their internal fragmentation, external differences among parties that limit the formation of broadly based platforms, and a tendency to follow personalities over party doctrine. There is a 19th-century Bengali joke that appropriately characterizes political parties in Bangladesh: One Bengali—one political party; two Bengalis—two political parties; three Bengalis—still two parties, but each has two factions.

Despite these handicaps, opposition political parties are adept at disruption and have managed through public rallies and demonstrations to derail policies proposed by previous Bangladesh governments. Should military dominance prove too restrictive or the MLA leadership be inept at finding workable solutions to Bangladesh's economic problems, the political parties might offer a channel for popular dissent that would threaten the military government.

### *Political Parties With Significant Constituencies.*

Of the more than 50 political parties in Bangladesh, only seven have a significant constituency.

*Bangladesh Nationalist Party.* Conservative and formed from a variety of factions by President Zia, the BNP was the ruling party prior to the latest coup. Despite its close association with the Zia regime, the BNP has suffered the most from the MLA's anticorruption campaign. Because of the corruption charges that have been brought against many BNP politicians and businessmen, the party's leadership has been weakened. According to US Embassy reporting, BNP members hope to recoup their losses and resume playing a major role in Bangladesh politics as a middle-of-the-road party. Although political activities are banned, BNP party officials reportedly continue to meet privately to discuss the party's future. Should the BNP manage to avoid factionalism, a possible candidate for future BNP leadership is retired Maj. Gen. Nurul Islam (Shishu), a prominent BNP member and dissident in that party's former leadership. According to the same Embassy source, Islam may support Ershad if he chooses to follow Zia's precedent and establish a reformed BNP as the country's ruling party.

*Awami League (Hasina).* Although divided by a schism between moderates and radicals, the League is the best organized of Bangladesh's political parties. Originally founded in 1949 by leaders who withdrew from the Muslim League, the Awami League became the first Bengali nationalist party in East Pakistan (although it also had a small following in West Pakistan). A major source of its appeal is its legacy as the party of Bengali independence. Its left-of-center ideology attracts a large number of youth. A relatively substantial flow of funds from various and often controversial sources, such as India, assures it some financial strength, although its Indian affiliation is a political liability.

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The return to Bangladesh from India in May 1981 of Sheikh Hasina, daughter of the assassinated Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, to become president of the Awami League provided a needed boost for the party. Critics of the League focus on its association with the crime, corruption, and high inflation of Sheikh Mujib's one-man rule and the League's connections with India. The critics regard Sheikh Hasina as an Indian puppet.

*Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal.* The JSD, Bangladesh's major radical leftist political party, is financially strapped and internally divided over an ideological dispute concerning whether to support a more moderate stance in cooperation with the Awami League or advocate immediate revolution. It may have a small military following, and it has been the most active party in trying to win favor with the *jawans*, or enlisted men. JSD ideology tends to be more radical in public than in private. Its members have been labeled "political prostitutes" because of their tendency to compromise when expedient, although this is a well-practiced Bengali trait. Although it is doubtful that the JSD could launch its long-announced mass movement, it remains a radical force in Bangladesh and is sought after in forming political coalitions.

In 1980 serious differences between the students and the leadership resulted in a split in which the majority of JSD students at Dacca University formed a break-away faction, the Bangladesher Samajtantrik Dal (BSD). The BSD has been unable to attract any national leaders and remains primarily a student organization.

*Muslim League.* Conservative but not reactionary, the Muslim League's strength stems from its historical dominance in the politics of East Bengal during the years of Pakistani rule from 1947 until its defeat by the Awami League in 1970. Its membership dissipated after Bangladesh obtained its independence because of the constitutional provision prohibiting religious-based parties, but it was revived in 1976 when restrictions were lifted. Although the League professes to call for an Islamic state, its policies appear to be more rhetorical than substantive, and it is not fundamentalist. Its general attitude is that life was much better before independence. It favors a government position that will keep both the Awami League and leftists from power.

*Democratic League.* This moderate, rightwing party is led by former Bangladesh President Khondokar Mushtaque Ahmed. It was formed by Mushtaque in 1976 following the reestablishment of political parties. In 1977 Mushtaque was jailed by a martial law court on corruption charges. The party has achieved some significance since Mushtaque's release in March 1980. Basic weaknesses of the party are its inability to organize effectively below the national level and the fact that its following is based primarily on loyalty to Mushtaque rather than party affiliation. Although Mushtaque aspires to a center-right coalition, other rightwing parties are suspicious of his former Awami League association. The Awami League refuses to cooperate with Mushtaque because they consider him responsible for Sheikh Mujib's assassination.

*Jamaat-e-Islami.* The Jamaat stands at the extreme right of the political spectrum. Formed in 1941 in British India, the party sided with the Pakistanis during the 1971 civil war. The Jamaat calls for a democratic but strict Islamic state. Membership in the Jamaat is small due to the rigid requirements applicants must meet to demonstrate their commitment to Islam.

The main controversy surrounding the Jamaat has been its opposition to secession from Pakistan during the civil war. Still, in early 1981 the Jamaat made a strong attempt to rally public support. Subsequent clashes between veterans of the civil war and Jamaat members, viewed as collaborators, caused the party to resume a low profile. Following Zia's death a few months later, opposition to Jamaat rallies died down, probably reflecting the more conservative trend in Bangladesh politics.

*Islamic Democratic League.* The IDL was formed in 1976 as a coalition of Islamic-oriented parties. It is poorly organized below the national level and maintains an insignificant student front. The coalition won six seats in the 1979 parliamentary elections. The defection of the Jamaat-e-Islami from the League in 1979 and the independent position taken by the Muslim League has diminished the IDL's influence.

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The IDL, which calls for an Islamic state in Bangladesh, reportedly admires Iran's Ayatollah Khomeini and may receive support from the Iranian Embassy in Dacca.

**Communist and Leftist Influence.** The Communist parties of Bangladesh are largely factionalized and centered in the cities. Some Communist activity has spilled over into the countryside in the past in the southwest districts and possibly in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, although the more recent extent of such influence is not known. The Communist Party of Bangladesh (pro-Soviet) is of minor importance in Bangladesh politics or internationally. Before the martial law takeover, the student wing—Chatra Union—was active on the campus of Dacca University as was its labor front, the Trade Union Center. Membership in both groups is small. There are three other small pro-Soviet parties: the Workers Party, the National Awami Party (Muzaffar), and the Jatiya Ekota Party. The three minor pro-Chinese parties worth noting are the United People's Party (UPP), the Sammyabadi Dal, and the Ganotantrik Party. The UPP is the only pro-Chinese party with any organization. Its small but active labor front, the Bangla Sramik Dal, has clashed with the Bangladesh Nationalist Party's labor groups. More significant than the above parties is the leftist influence in the Awami League (Hasina) and the JSD, where radical elements are strongest within the student fronts.

**Party Coalitions.** Party alliances, such as they are, are short lived and based on expediency. Even when several parties have aligned to oppose government policies, their stance has not been unified. A major problem in any coalition between Bangladesh political parties is leadership, which each group is reluctant to give up. For instance, among the rightwing parties, both the Muslim League and Democratic League are insistent upon leading any coalition. The Awami League and the JSD have formed temporary alliances on numerous occasions and are likely to do so again. Lasting cooperation is hindered, however, by the League's dominance, the historical antagonism between the two, and the League's more centrist orientation. The only significant centrist party, the BNP, is a heterogeneous and fragile coalition of leftists, rightists, and moderates; the party's leadership hopes to

rebuild the BNP and would be unlikely to favor any leftist or rightist alliance that could weaken its position.

#### **Tribal Insurgency**

Tribal insurgents have managed to restrict movement in the Chittagong Hill Tracts by attacking military posts and terrorizing local civilians. The mostly Buddhist tribes of the region believe the Muslim Bengalis are a threat to their land and way of life. Under British Indian and Pakistani rule, the tribal people felt more secure because a law, the 1900 Act, barred purchase and habitation of their land by nontribals. Following Bangladesh's independence, the new government, in an effort to relieve population pressures elsewhere in the country, ignored the act and allowed Bengali homesteaders into the thinly populated area. In 1972 the Chakmas, the most numerous of the 13 tribes living in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, formed a militant organization called the Shanti Bahini to resist the encroachments. Skirmishes between these tribal rebels and Bangladesh paramilitary forces stationed in the area occur regularly, at times intensifying to the point that the Army has had to support the local security forces.

Unrest in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, while currently not a major destabilizing factor, could be exploited by outside sources wanting to cause problems for any government in Dacca. Bangladesh's allegations of Indian involvement in tribal disturbances and India's denials have added to the strained relations between the two neighbors.

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Armed  
Forces

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## Armed Forces

Maintaining the loyalty of a strongly politicized military is essential to the stability of any government in Bangladesh. The military, particularly the Army, has been the strongest institution throughout Bangladesh's short history. Although the military has the power to make or break any government, it is not cohesive and discipline is poor. The military's internal factionalism will present a continuing source of potential political instability in Bangladesh.

The most prominent split is between those who fought against Pakistan in 1971 and the repatriates who were interned in West Pakistan at that time and later allowed to return to Bangladesh. The generally more conservative repatriates have gradually gained control, their predominance increasing following the coup attempt against President Zia, which was led by freedom fighters who believed they were being edged out of power.

Divisiveness also exists between senior and junior officers—the latter tend to be more impatient and expect more rapid solutions to Bangladesh's problems—as well as between officers and enlisted men. Leftist influence of unknown extent exists in the enlisted ranks. One of the factors reportedly restraining Ershad from a preelection coup was doubt that the enlisted men would obey orders for such an action.

### Strength and Capabilities

Bangladesh's total military strength of about 157,000 is made up of the regular services and the paramilitary forces (see table 6). Although Bangladesh has no compulsory military service, recruitment is not a problem given the economic benefits a military career offers in a country where unemployment is high and living standards are low.

Too small and ill equipped to defend itself against a major external threat, the armed forces' objective is to build a modern, mobile, and highly trained fighting force capable of maintaining internal security and raising the costs for any potential invader. With a

**Table 6**  
**Bangladesh Military Strength**

<b>Ground Forces</b>	
Army personnel	70,000
Major formations	5 division headquarters
Maneuver brigades	11 infantry; 1 armor
Main battle tanks	
T-54	30
T-59	48 <sup>a</sup>
Artillery pieces (over 100 mm)	66
<b>Air Force</b>	
Personnel	2,000
Fighter aircraft	34
MIG-21	8
F-6 (MIG-19)	18 (12 additional on order from China)
MIG-17	8
Trainers	38
Helicopters	23
<b>Navy</b>	
Personnel	5,500
Major combatants	3 frigates
Patrol craft	19 (13 coastal and 6 river)
<b>Paramilitary Personnel</b>	
Bangladesh Rifles	30,000
Bangladesh Ansars	14,000
Armed Police Reserve	36,000

<sup>a</sup> Not confirmed.

budget of about \$150 million in FY 1982, the military received less than 7 percent of that year's government budget. The budget for FY 1983 has allocated about \$190 million for defense, an increase of over 25 percent.

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On their founding in early 1972, the armed forces were equipped with weapons left in East Pakistan and other equipment captured during the 1971 war. The armed forces were heavily dependent upon India and the USSR for technical training and equipment during the regime of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. Following the demise of Sheikh Mujib in late 1975, relations with India and the USSR quickly cooled. Since the emergence of the present government, the Soviets and Indians have provided almost no support. China has responded to Bangladesh's request for assistance by providing some major items such as aircraft. The government is also seeking other sources, mainly among Western countries.

In recent years China has supplanted Moscow as Bangladesh's main source of military aid. A Bangladesh military delegation visited Beijing in April 1982 to negotiate an arms deal, part of which Bangladesh expects to receive as grant and part through liberal interest-free terms. According to a US Embassy source in Beijing, the equipment to be supplied by May 1983 includes one squadron of F6s (MIG-19s), an unknown quantity of T-59 tanks, and six transport aircraft.

#### Army

The Bangladesh Army dominates the military structure by virtue of its size. It is organized into five divisions and several independent brigades with both tactical and territorial functions (see map). The mission of the Army is to conduct land warfare in the national defense, to assist in the maintenance of internal security, and to support civil emergency relief operations. It could not wage successful defensive operations against India, although in combination with paramilitary forces, it could wage an extensive guerrilla campaign. The Army is capable of maintaining internal security in urban areas, however, its abilities to do so throughout the country are limited.

Although it has a vast reservoir of potentially available manpower, the Army's major weaknesses are a lack of modern equipment, a shortage of personnel with technical expertise, an inadequate logistics system, a low state of combat readiness, and inadequate training.

The Bangladesh Army has only a rudimentary training program for its personnel. Following the British regimental system, each combat or technical service apparently has a school and training center that imparts basic and some specialized training to recruits. Additional specialized training is obtained on the job. Officers are drawn both from graduates of a six-week officer candidate school, known as Battle School, and the Bangladesh military academies at Comilla and Chittagong. Infantry training is conducted near Sylhet, where junior officers of all branches learn small unit tactics, company command techniques, regimental and brigade staff functions, and weapons systems. The United Kingdom is assisting Bangladesh with the establishment of a Joint Services Staff College, to be located near Dacca. A seven-member British military team arrived in mid-1977 to direct the staff college until Bangladesh develops sufficient proficiency for independent operation. The college provides Bangladesh with its first in-country senior staff training capability.

#### Navy

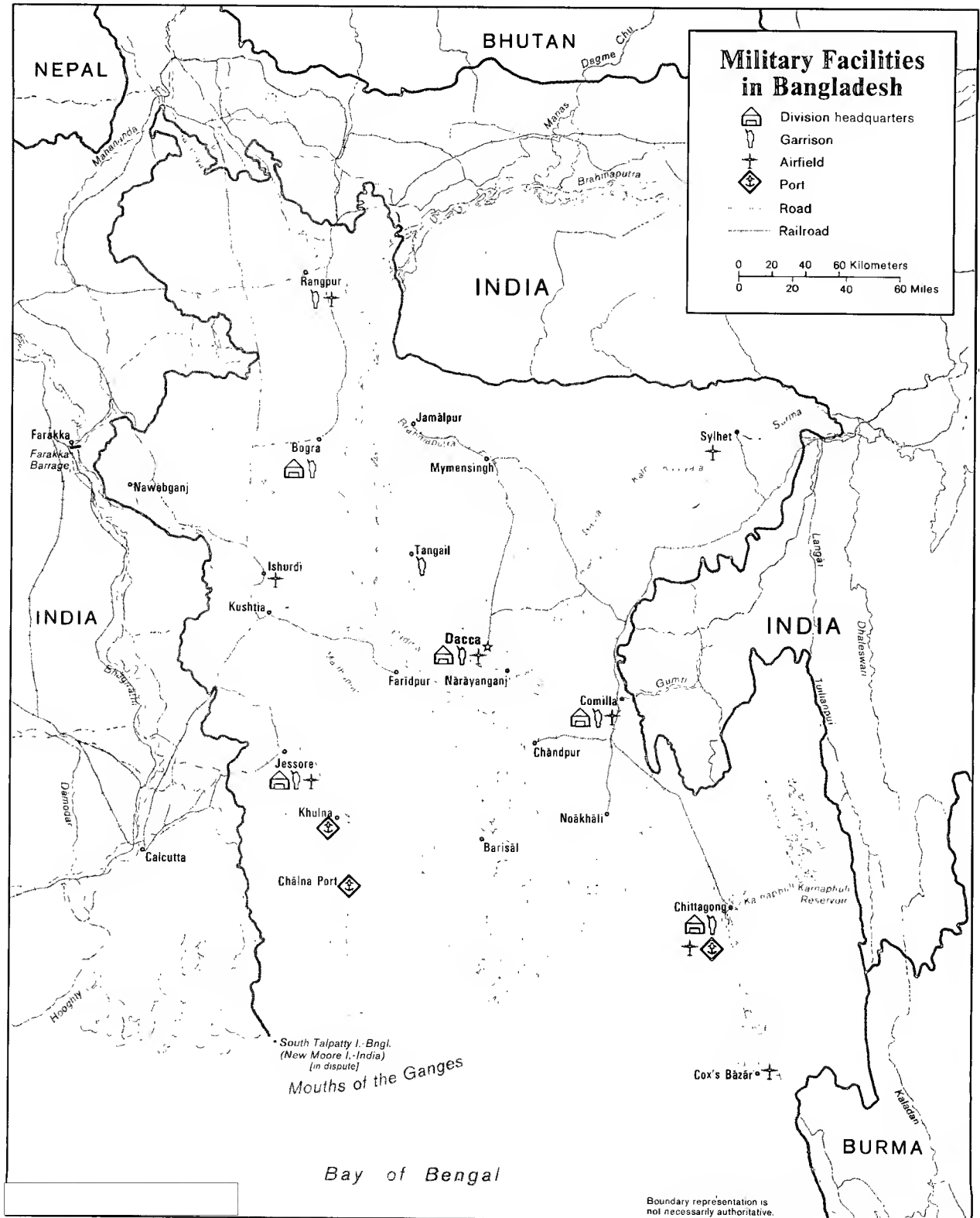
The Navy's main operating base is located at Chittagong, Bangladesh's chief port. A smaller base is at Khulna in the south where patrol craft are stationed. Repairs and maintenance are conducted at Narayanganj Navy Dockyard just southeast of Dacca. The mission of the Bangladesh Navy is to protect coastal waters, including a vast network of inland waterways. The Navy also is charged with providing assistance to civil authorities, internal security, salvage work in ports and inland waterways, and disaster relief. At present, the Navy does not have enough ships and craft to perform its missions satisfactorily.

Although the Navy has ample repair facilities, it, like the other services, is heavily dependent on foreign sources for repair parts. The Navy Dockyard at Narayanganj has built three small patrol boats for river use. Construction of shipbuilding and repair facilities in Chittagong, designed for merchant use, and the arrival of a drydock from Yugoslavia in 1980 provide the Navy with a future capability for indigenous construction and maintenance of larger naval craft.

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Figure 12



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The previous practice of recruiting experienced seamen and technicians from the merchant marine and inland waterways organization is changing. More recently, the emphasis has shifted to secondary school graduates for officer cadet training and to less educated personnel between the ages of 18 and 20 for enlisted basic training. The Bangladesh Naval Training Academy, which formally opened in 1976, provides training for both officers and enlisted personnel. Following training, promising officer cadets may be sent abroad for additional schooling, primarily in the United Kingdom or India.

#### **Air Force**

Despite the addition of Chinese F-6 fighters, the Air Force's performance is hindered by the inadequate number of qualified pilots and maintenance technicians. We believe a number of pilots and senior Air Force personnel were among the 92 persons executed following the coup attempt in October 1977. In-country training of personnel is limited to basic military courses and midcareer command and staff training. Flight and technical training is now carried out largely by China.

The Air Force is totally dependent on external sources for equipment and spare parts, the USSR and China being the primary suppliers. A continuing shortage of critical parts and lubricants substantially reduces the operational capability of the Air Force. Its MIG-21s have been grounded frequently because of maintenance and structural defects and equipment shortages. Although the addition of the F6 fighters has improved the Air Force's air defense capability, the Air Force cannot strongly resist potential aggressors.

#### **Paramilitary Forces**

**Bangladesh Rifles.** Organized into approximately 29 battalion-size "wings," the mission of the Bangladesh Rifles is to provide internal and border security. They are active in counterinsurgency operations in the Chittagong area, although Army assistance is required during the periodic flareups in the fighting there. This force can cope with sporadic internal unrest, however, it is not large enough or sufficiently equipped to counteract widespread, organized dissidence.

**Bangladesh Ansars.** A "second line of defense" force and organized into approximately 40 battalions, the mission of the Ansars is to assist regular forces in the maintenance of public order, social welfare activities, and national security. Its limited size renders it capable of providing only marginal assistance.

**Armed Police Reserve.** This force supplements the unarmed local police units. Stations of varying size up to battalion strength are located in urban areas, whereas rural posts average 15 to 20 men.

**Coastal Police.** Little is known about the strength and organization of this force charged with patrolling territorial waters and assisting in the protection of Bangladesh's deep sea and coastal fishermen. Its capabilities presumably are very limited.



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## Foreign Relations

Given Bangladesh's military and economic weakness, the primary objectives of its foreign policy are to ensure a continued flow of external assistance and to maintain stable relations with its dominant neighbor, India. The initial foreign policy objectives established in 1971 of securing recognition, obtaining membership in major international organizations, and enlisting international support for relief, rehabilitation, and economic development have been generally realized.

Islamic solidarity is another mainstay of Bangladesh foreign policy, providing a certain psychological counterweight to Hindu India, which surrounds Bangladesh on three sides. Islam has played a major role in cementing ties with wealthy Middle Eastern donors, especially Saudi Arabia and other moderate Arab states. The Bangladeshis, however, are conscious of their need to temper their Islamic policies to avoid provoking India.

### India

Most Bangladeshis are innately suspicious of Indian intentions and tend to view any problems in relations with New Delhi as a sign that India is attempting to undermine their government. Mutual distrust and suspicion have long exacerbated real differences between the two countries. Bangladeshis, however, are realistic enough to recognize that they have little choice but to get along with their powerful neighbor.

India and Bangladesh signed a 25-year Treaty of Friendship in March 1972. Bangladesh's appreciation for India's aid in its liberation struggle was soon replaced, however, by fears of Indian expansionism, reinforced in 1975 by New Delhi's absorption of its protectorate Sikkim and later by India's policy positions on Afghanistan and Kampuchea, which were at variance with the other South Asian states. In August 1981 Bangladesh considered abrogating the 1972 Friendship Treaty and replacing it with a similar treaty with China, but it retreated lest the action provoke India.

Current relations between India and Bangladesh can best be characterized as correct. Official Indian reaction to the martial law takeover was cautious and basically limited to views that developments in Bangladesh are an internal affair and that harmonious relations between the two countries would continue. Editorial comment was more negative, dismissing Ershad's statements on corruption as a pretext for seizing power and expressing the hope that representative government would be restored. Acknowledging that it would prefer to deal with an elected administration, the Indian Government has little alternative but to work with the military leadership. Although New Delhi would favor the emergence of a more accommodating government in Dacca, it recognizes that blatant Indian interference in Bangladesh's internal affairs could be counterproductive for India.

India's tough position on bilateral disputes with Bangladesh reflects Prime Minister Gandhi's longstanding attitude that India is the predominant power in the subcontinent and that its neighbors must accommodate themselves to Indian interests (see box). The Martial Law Administration has talked of not sacrificing national interests in dealing with outstanding bilateral problems between the two countries. Such a stance is only rhetorical, however, as Bangladesh lacks the leverage to give its remarks substance. Solutions will depend on the kind of relationship India decides it wants with its smaller and weaker neighbor and on the diplomatic skill Bangladesh can muster in negotiating from a position of weakness. While Bangladesh's delicate political condition reduces its ability to resist external pressures, any sign of subservience to India on important issues would imperil the survival of any government in Dacca.

### Pakistan

Bangladesh-Pakistani relations are guardedly cordial, having improved steadily since both countries exchanged ambassadors in January 1977. After an

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***Areas of dispute between Bangladesh and India over which worsening relations could arise include:***

*South Talpatty Island. In September 1981 India withdrew six gunboats that it had sent to counter Bangladesh's claim to a tiny, silt-formed island near the Bay of Bengal. The situation had triggered anti-Indian riots in Dacca.*

*Farakka Barrage. This Indian-built dam diverted Ganges water vital for irrigating Bengali rice crops during the dry season. Bangladesh's attempts to secure a greater portion of the dry-season river flow have been consistently stymied by India. A five-year watersharing agreement signed by the Desai and Zia governments in November 1977 guaranteed Bangladesh a substantial minimum amount of water, even during the dry season. A commission formed in 1978 to work out a long-term solution of augmenting the flow of the Ganges river was unsuccessful. Negotiations are continuing on the agreement—which expires in November and which Prime Minister Gandhi, believing the former Desai government too generous—refuses to extend. Among the issues is a controversial Indian proposal for a link canal to divert Brahmaputra waters to the Ganges.*

*Chittagong Hill Tracts (Ramgarh, Ramgamati, and Bandarban Districts). Long-term tribal tensions in the area have created a refugee problem; Bangladesh refuses to accept what it claims are expelled residents of India, and India claims there is a vast influx of persecuted non-Muslim tribesmen. In September 1981 a cross-border attack, which each side accused the other of launching, heightened tension. Although repatriation of several thousand refugees to Bangladesh was under way late last year, the problem has not been fully resolved.*

*Enclaves. Each country has small enclaves in the other, with alleged prevention of free access the major irritant. In October 1982, India, in an attempt to ease bilateral disputes, leased a small area to provide Bangladesh access to two enclaves in India.*

initial period of hostility, the first significant step toward reconciliation came in February 1974 during the Lahore Islamic Summit Conference, where each country recognized the other. This step was encouraged earlier in 1973 when an airlift under the auspices of the United Nations brought Bengalis from Pakistan to Bangladesh and non-Bengali Biharis from Bangladesh to Pakistan.

The primary remaining issue between the two countries concerns the fate of the additional 300,000 to 400,000 Bihari Muslims who, after the war, expressed a preference for Pakistani citizenship though they remained in Bangladesh. (The Biharis are Muslims from India who migrated to then East Pakistan in 1947.) The last large-scale repatriation of 12,000 occurred in 1979; planning is under way for an additional 5,000 to be returned to Pakistan.

The new military regime desires close relations with Pakistan, primarily as a lever against India, and in the hope that Pakistan will lobby on Bangladesh's behalf with the United States, China, and Saudi Arabia. Islamic bonds and a governing military leadership also ally the two nations. Any attempt Ershad may undertake toward a bolder pro-Pakistani position, however, will have to be weighed against an ensuing deterioration in Bangladesh's relations with India. New Delhi would be reluctant to allow any Bangladesh leadership to curry too much favor with Islamabad.

**China**

Bangladesh values its friendly relations with China as a counterbalance to the overwhelming presence of India, as a source of military equipment and training, and as a modest donor of economic assistance. Both governments share similar suspicions about Soviet intentions in Asia. Although Bangladesh may hope for Chinese support in bilateral problems with India, it realizes that China's interest in normalizing relations with India makes it unlikely that Beijing would again give the Bangladeshis the strong support it provided in 1976 over the watersharing issue.

China maintains a substantial embassy in Dacca and is Bangladesh's principal arms supplier. Between January 1977 and January 1980 China provided \$27.7

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million in grants to the Bangladesh military and sold the government an additional \$10 million worth of equipment. Since early 1980 the military trade has been based on cash-and-carry sales and not grants. This shift reflects China's decision to devote more resources to its own development, as well as China's emphasis on improving relations with India.

#### USSR

Although Ershad favors a continuing tilt toward the West, specifically the United States, he seems interested in improving relations with Moscow. Bangladesh's preceding government had also begun to make overtures to the Soviets in order to balance its relations with the superpowers.

Although China has replaced the USSR as the main arms supplier to Bangladesh, the USSR is providing maintenance assistance on several previously supplied MIG-21 aircraft. The Bangladesh Air Force is also interested in purchasing Soviet AN-32 transport aircraft, possibly for delivery in 1985. Recently, Bangladesh and the USSR signed their annual trade barter protocol, the 11th in their trade partnership. The barter provides for an exchange of commodities worth \$83.13 million in each direction. Educational exchanges provide for undergraduate and graduate-level study grants for about 100 Bangladesh students each year.

#### Relations With the West

Bangladesh's relations with the West are good because of the extensive economic and humanitarian support provided, particularly by the United States. When President Zia assumed power, he moved Bangladesh away from its close relationship with India and the USSR and nearer to China and the United States. This trend has continued. The meeting between Ershad and President Reagan in June 1982 received considerable press coverage in Dacca. Besides US assistance, economic aid comes from Canada, Sweden, Switzerland, the Netherlands, Norway, Denmark, Finland, France, Italy, West Germany, Australia, Belgium, the United Kingdom, and Japan. In addition, the European Economic Community has provided food assistance, particularly wheat, to Bangladesh.

The West provides some military assistance to Bangladesh. Most recently, the Bangladeshis purchased their third frigate from the United Kingdom. A seven-member British military team has assisted with the establishment of a military Joint Services Staff College to be located near Dacca. To date, the United States, through its security assistance program, has trained 89 officers and enlisted men in managerial and tactical skills. The United States is discussing with Bangladesh the possible sale of some nonlethal, dual-use US military equipment such as communications and engineering gear.

#### Islamic States

The search for financial aid has led Bangladesh to seek closer relations with wealthy Islamic oil states, particularly Saudi Arabia. Ershad's first overseas visit after assuming leadership was to Saudi Arabia. Saudi aid to Bangladesh is divided into loans from the Islamic Development Bank and grant aid. Although the Saudis do not view Bangladesh as a country with much political influence, they consider it a contributor to Islamic solidarity.

Bangladesh is a significant source of manpower for the Middle Eastern countries, for which it receives in return sorely needed foreign exchange. Bangladesh labor attaches, who assist in arranging jobs for Bangladesh workers, are present in Iran, Iraq, Libya, Kuwait, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia, and there are plans to open additional offices in Bahrain and Oman.

Besides economic ties, Bangladesh values its membership in the Muslim community and has been active in demonstrating its affiliation in the Organization of the Islamic Conference. Sentiment for the Palestinians has spread since the Israeli invasion of Lebanon. According to PLO claims, between April 1981 and March 1982 some 1,200, and possibly as many as 2,500, Bangladesh recruits were sent to Lebanon directly or indirectly by the PLO mission in Dacca. Since the invasion, the number of recruits may have increased, although no reliable numbers are available. Bangladesh also has dispatched a 12-member military medical team to Damascus to assist the Palestinians.

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US Interests



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## US Interests

US political and economic interests in Bangladesh are largely a function of Washington's broader goal of preserving regional stability. Instability in Bangladesh could lead to far more serious regional consequences affecting India and Pakistan and intensifying Sino-Soviet competition. Regional disputes between Bangladesh and India might lead the Bangladeshis to seek US involvement in such matters as the Ganges water-sharing negotiations or demarcation of the marine boundary between the two countries. The United States has stood aside from these issues by stating that the problems of the area have the best chance of being solved if there is no outside involvement.

### Economic Assistance

The US Government has granted \$958 million in food aid to Bangladesh since independence. The program began on an emergency basis and has evolved into a regular program. Beginning in 1978, the Title III food assistance program made possible the establishment of a foodgrain security system, including a procurement program to support producer prices and acquire domestic commodities for reserves, an open-market sales mechanism to release commodities to dampen excessive price upswings, and expanded storage facilities.

The United States is engaged in one power generation project, the Karnafuli Hydropower Station, which is nearing completion. Since 1977 the United States has supported rural electrification through the Area Coverage Rural Electrification Program (ACRE). Phase I will cover some 1.6 million households and is scheduled for completion in 1983. The US contribution to this project is \$69.3 million.

The United States is considering providing technical assistance for a program intended to reduce Bangladesh's dependence on petroleum imports, possibly to include seismic testing and gasfield development.

In addition to food and energy programs, the United States provides assistance for research and development, fertilizer production, irrigation, health, and

family planning. In total, the US Government has contributed more than \$1.8 billion in food and development aid to Bangladesh.

### Military Assistance

Although the Bangladesh Government has expressed interest in obtaining communications and engineering equipment from the United States, no foreign military sales are currently proposed. The United States is engaged in a security assistance program that provides training in military managerial and tactical skills.

### Trade

The United States is Bangladesh's largest trading partner. It buys about \$70 million of Bangladesh's exports annually, mainly jute carpet backing and sacks, and exports large amounts of wheat, cotton, edible oil, and tallow to Bangladesh, largely under AID and other donor financing.

### Investments

According to US Embassy reporting, total US private investment in Bangladesh is roughly estimated at \$10 million. The principal US firms involved in this limited investment are four pharmaceutical companies, four construction firms, and two US banks.

Although the Martial Law Administration is encouraging further foreign investment, it has proposed a controversial policy reducing the manufacture and sale of a number of pharmaceuticals in Bangladesh. Multinational pharmaceutical firms in the country, including US ones, claim they would lose considerable revenue if the policy is implemented. Other problems with which US investors must cope are a poorly developed and overburdened power, transportation, and communications network, limited domestic demand, a labor force lacking in skills, and a cumbersome bureaucracy.



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## Personalities

**Hussain Mohammad Ershad**



*Chief Martial Law Administrator; Minister of Defense* (since March 1982). A career military officer, Lt. Gen. Hussain Mohammad Ershad heads a country that had been drifting since the assassination of President Ziaur Rahman in May 1981. Ershad had served as Chief of Army Staff since December 1978 and received his present rank in November 1979.

Well disposed toward the United States, Ershad will continue Bangladesh's moderate and cooperative relationship with the West. He is deeply suspicious of Indian intentions but realizes he has to foster "correct" relations with New Delhi. He attaches importance to relations with moderate Islamic states, particularly Saudi Arabia.

In 1950 Ershad graduated from the University of Dacca. He was commissioned in the Pakistan Army in 1953, and he was the commanding officer of the East Bengal regiments from 1968 to 1971. He was arrested in East Pakistan in 1971 during Bangladesh's independence struggle. His internment precluded his participation in the war, although he later served as president of the Bangladesh Freedom Fighters Association.

Ershad, 52, is a conservative with good common sense. He is often slow to engage in conversation with foreigners and then generally is comfortable only in discussing subjects about which he is knowledgeable, usually military issues. Quiet and unassuming, Ershad often lapses into long silences during a conversation before he warms to a subject. He speaks fluent English.

**A. F. M. Ahsanuddin Choudhury**



*President* (since March 1982). A retired Supreme Court justice, A. F. M. Ahsanuddin Choudhury is little more than a figurehead. He left government service in 1977 and before his appointment as President was extensively involved in social service organizations.

After graduating first in his law school class at the University of Dacca, Choudhury joined the then Bengal civil service in 1942. He subsequently served as district judge in Sylhet, Rangpur, and Dacca. He was elevated to the High Court in 1973.

Choudhury, about 67, is chairman of the management board and the board of trustees of Dacca Shishu Hospital, the governing body of the Dacca Law College, and the National Foundation of Mental Health. He is married and has one son and two daughters.

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**Mohammad Nooruddin Khan**

*Chief of the General Staff* (since August 1980). A career military officer in his midforties, Brigadier Mohammad Nooruddin Khan is an engineer who is among the senior generals in Bangladesh. He is a shrewd individual who has the respect of his superiors, peers, and subordinates and who may be the "brains" behind the Army's role in the current martial law government. Nooruddin Khan has been cooperative with US officials in Dacca.

A repatriated officer, Nooruddin Khan was named a zonal martial law administrator in 1976 as well as commander of the 105th Brigade. In 1978 he became commander of the 33rd Infantry Division; he held the latter post until becoming chief of the general staff.

**Aminur Rahman Shamsud Doha**

*Minister of Foreign Affairs* (since June 1982). A. R. S. Doha is a longtime confidant of and perhaps the closest civilian adviser to Chief Martial Law Administrator Ershad (the two were schoolmates). A former Army officer, publisher, and politician, Doha served as an ambassador after Bangladesh gained its independence. Immediately after the coup that brought Ershad to power in March 1982, Ershad brought Doha into the Cabinet as Minister of Information and Broadcasting. Doha held that post until he succeeded to the Foreign Ministry.

Doha comes from a political family (his father was a cabinet minister in Pakistan during the 1960s). He received his early education at Christian schools in Calcutta and Darjeeling. During the late 1940s and early 1950s, he studied at the University of Dacca, where Ershad was also a student. Doha joined the Pakistani Army in 1952; he was the top cadet in his officer training class. He later graduated from the Royal Military College of Science in Wiltshire, England, and he has also attended the basic artillery course at Fort Sill, Oklahoma. During his military career, Doha was primarily involved in intelligence work. He retired from the Army for health reasons in 1968 with the rank of major. He then established the *Interwing Weekly Review*, which he edited and published until 1971. Concurrently, Doha served as an official of the Awami League, then the primary opposition party in Pakistan; he was imprisoned several times for "inciting dissatisfaction with the (Pakistani) Martial Law Administration."

In 1972 Doha was appointed to the Bangladesh Diplomatic Service. He subsequently served as Ambassador to Yugoslavia, Romania, Iran, and Turkey. He was High Commissioner to the United Kingdom from 1977 until March 1982.

Doha, 53, was a member of the 1948 Olympic team (sport unknown), and he still maintains an interest in sports. He has written three books, including one on the Arab-Israeli conflict.

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**A. H. S. Atual Karim**

*Foreign Secretary* (since May 1982). A career diplomat and the ranking civil servant in the Foreign Ministry, Atual Karim is an unassuming, competent individual who will probably discharge his duties in a low-key manner. In the realm of foreign policy decisionmaking, he is likely to be overshadowed by Foreign Minister Doha. Karim is essentially apolitical and is well disposed toward the United States.

Karim joined the Pakistani Diplomatic Service in 1955 and served in missions in Rangoon, Stockholm, and San Francisco. At the time of the war for Bangladesh's independence, Karim—then the counselor at the Pakistani Embassy in Rome—chose Bangladesh nationality. He was appointed director general for administration in the new country's Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1972 and later served as Deputy High Commissioner (1974-76) in New Delhi. Before his appointment as additional foreign secretary in 1980, Karim was Ambassador to Indonesia for three years.

Karim, 48, is a graduate of Dacca University. He attended Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy and the Georgetown University Institute of Language and Linguistics during 1955-56 and studied French in Paris in 1957.

**Abul Maal Abdul Muhith**

*Minister of Finance and Planning* (since March 1982). A thorough professional, A. M. A. Muhith is one of his country's top economic advisers. He returned to the government after a brief hiatus (he had retired in January 1982 after six years as secretary of the External Resources Division in the Ministry of Planning and a brief period as an alternate director of the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development). Frank and hard working, Muhith is intelligent, experienced, and action oriented. He is highly regarded by both his government and US officials; the latter have commented that his appointment brings a solid technocrat to a critical ministry.

Muhith has studied economics at Oxford University and holds an M.A. degree in public administration from Harvard University. He served as economic counselor in the Pakistani Embassy in Washington from 1969 until 1971. After Bangladesh gained its independence, he held the same post in the Bangladesh Embassy. In 1972 he returned to Dacca to serve as a secretary in the Planning Commission. In the early 1970s Muhith acted as a roving economic troubleshooter for Bangladesh, handling negotiations on prewar debt issues and economic planning. From 1974 until 1977 he was an executive director of the Asian Development Bank in Manila.

Muhith, 47, speaks English.

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**Humayun Rashid  
Choudhury**



*Ambassador to the United States* (since July 1982). A professional diplomat, Humayun Rashid Choudhury was nominated as Ambassador to the United States three months after the coup that brought the present Martial Law Administration to power. He had served since May 1981 as Foreign Secretary, the number-two post in the Foreign Ministry. In that position, he was a confident, pragmatic decisionmaker. Since the appointment in June 1982 of A. R. S. Doha as Foreign Minister, however, Choudhury has expressed some reservations about the new regime. Although he probably does not enjoy the full confidence of his government, he is generally expected to act as a thoroughgoing professional during his tenure in Washington. Choudhury is basically well disposed toward the United States.

Choudhury is suspicious of Soviet intentions and actions in Bangladesh, but, as Foreign Secretary, he exercised a good deal of caution in taking actions against the Soviets. He has carefully cultivated his relations with Arab representatives in Dacca and has participated in as many Islamic Conference activities as possible. He has nonetheless been critical of inter-Arab conflicts and of what he sees as a squandering of resources and an obsession with sophisticated weapons. He has argued that the Muslim world should concentrate on the liberation of Jerusalem.

Choudhury, 53, is deliberate in speech and manner and exhibits little emotion. He nonetheless has an excellent sense of humor. He speaks French, Portuguese, Italian, Urdu, and English.

**Jan (Mohabbat)  
Chowdhury**

*Minister of Interior* (since August 1982). A career military officer with an electronics background, Maj. Gen. Jan Chowdhury is one of a handful of generals who are among Chief Martial Law Administrator Ershad's closest advisers. Until August 1982 he was Director General of Forces Intelligence and was primarily responsible for counterintelligence matters. In mid-August he assumed the position of Minister of Interior, a move that will occupy him more heavily in the government bureaucracy and at the same time remove him from his power base. Chowdhury appears to be a shrewd and flexible powerbroker. He is heavily involved in civilian politics. He visited the United States in 1976 and since that time has regarded this country and Americans in a favorable light.

A 1955 graduate of the Pakistani military academy, Chowdhury was in Pakistan during 1967-73. He had served as director of signals at Bangladesh Army Headquarters immediately prior to becoming head of intelligence. He has generally been regarded as a dedicated, hard-working professional. Chowdhury is in his mid-to-late forties.

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**Abdul Mannaf**

*Commander, 24th Infantry Division; Martial Law Administrator, Zone C (Chittagong).* Maj. Gen. Abdul Mannaf is one of the six generals who make up the Martial Law Administration of Lieutenant General Ershad. US Embassy officials have heard from several sources that he and Ershad are not on good terms, and,

[redacted] He has expressed pro-American sympathies in the past.

A third-country military officer has described Mannaf as a well-qualified, professional soldier. He served as Chief of the General Staff during October 1977–December 1978. In that position he was involved in national development projects and in disaster relief in Rangpur. He has commanded several Bangladesh divisions and in March 1982 was also named Martial Law Administrator of Zone C.

Mannaf, about 50, is a graduate of the Pakistan Command and Staff College. In 1964 he visited Fort Knox, Kentucky, to attend short courses and briefings. He subsequently twice participated in training exercises with US Army Forces in West Germany.

**Atiqur Rahman**

*Principal Staff Officer, Commander in Chief Secretariat* (since June 1982). A widely respected, apolitical officer, Maj. Gen. Atiqur Rahman is a close associate of Chief Martial Law Administrator Ershad; Ershad may be grooming him to act as his deputy.

Little is known of Rahman's early career. By 1975 he had risen to the rank of colonel and was a Martial Law Administrator for the Chittagong Hill Tracts Zone and commander of the 65th Brigade in the same region. He was promoted to brigadier in 1976 and in August 1977 was named quartermaster general and received the rank of major general. Rahman became chief of the Bangladesh Rifles in December 1977. He is about 50 years old. Rahman may suffer from heart trouble.

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## Chronology

### B. C.

- 1000 The Bang tribe settles areas that are now Bangladesh and West Bengal.
- 320-180 Mauryan Empire, first great empire over present-day India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh, spreads; Buddhist influence also appears during this period.

### A. D.

- 300-500 Classical Hindu Age exists throughout northern India.
- 750-1050 The Buddhist Pala Dynasty brings stability and prosperity to Bengal.
- 990-1100 The Hindu Sen family obtains power in Bengal and divides Bengal into four regions.
- 1193 Indian states, now known as West Bengal and Bihar, fall to Muslims.
- 1206-1398 Delhi Sultanate established; Muslim era begins; Bengal becomes important source of war elephants.
- 1318 East Bengal annexed as province of Delhi sultanate.
- 1526-1707 Bengal prospers during the Mughal period.
- 1530 European traders enter Bengal.
- 1757 In battle of Plassey, the British East India Company's army defeats Mughal forces in Bengal.
- 1793 The Permanent Settlement of 1793 establishes new landlord system in Bengal, which proves to be disastrous for Bengali farmers.
- 1905 Bengal is partitioned, and awareness grows of need for political party to serve interests of Muslim community.
- 1906 The Muslim League is founded.
- 1947 India is partitioned, and Pakistan becomes independent. East Bengal becomes Pakistani Province.

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March-December 1971	Awami League declares independence of Bangladesh; Pakistan Army in East Pakistan surrenders to Indian armed forces; East Pakistan becomes independent state of Bangladesh.
January 1972	Sheikh Mujibur Rahman returns from prison in West Pakistan and is sworn in as Prime Minister.
November 1972	New constitution is approved by Constituent Assembly.
March 1973	Awami League wins first parliamentary elections.
January 1975	Constitution is amended abolishing parliamentary system and establishing presidential system with de facto one-man rule.
August 1975	Sheikh Mujib assassinated in Army coup; military assumes power.
November 1975	Army Chief of Staff Gen. Ziaur Rahman (Zia) takes power following new coup and assassination.
April 1977	Zia is named President.
February 1979	Parliamentary elections are held with Zia's Bangladesh National Party (BNP) winning majority.
May 1981	President Zia is assassinated in failed coup attempt; Vice President Abdus Sattar is sworn in as acting President.
November 1981	Sattar is elected formally as President under BNP candidacy.
March 1982	Lt. Gen. Hussain Mohammad Ershad becomes Chief Martial Law Administrator in bloodless military coup.



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Statistical  
Summary

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## Statistical Summary

### Government

*Legal name:* People's Republic of Bangladesh

*Capital:* Dacca

*Type:* Nominal republic under martial law.

### Land

142,500 square kilometers; about the size of Wisconsin.

### People

*Population:* 93,040,000 (July 1982); eighth most populous in world.

*Ethnic divisions:* Predominantly Bengali; 300,000 to 400,000 "Biharis"; and 600,000 or so tribals of Burmese extraction.

*Religion:* 85 percent Muslim, 14 percent Hindu, 1 percent Buddhist, Christian, or other.

*Language:* Bangla

### Economy

*GNP:* \$12.9 billion (1980/81); 1980/81 real GNP growth—7 percent.

*Per capita income:* \$140

*Agriculture:* Jute and rice.

*Major industries:* Jute manufactures, food processing, and cotton textiles.



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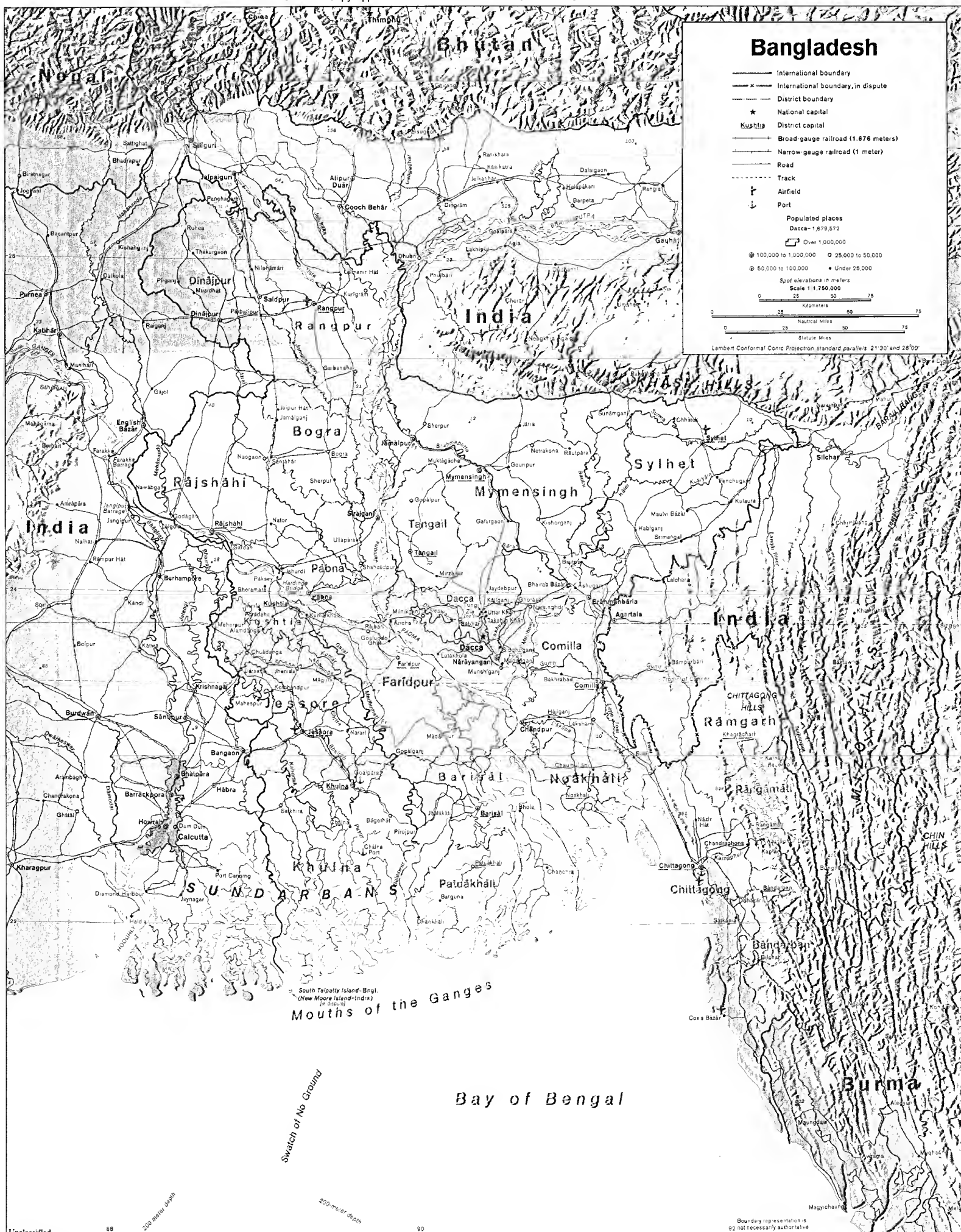
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